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The Rio Kid Western

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Copper COMMANDMENTS

A Complete Bob Pryor Novel

By LEE E. WELLS

COMICAL AS A CLOWN

A Broken Bow Story

By L. ERNENWEIN

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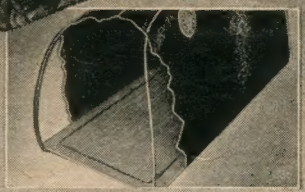

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The Rio Kid Western

Vol. XIII, No. 3 *A THRILLING PUBLICATION* December, 1946

A Complete Bob Pryor Frontier Action Novel

COPPER COMMANDMENTS

By LEE E. WELLS

The Rio Kid and his pard Celestino Mireles come a-ridin' to set things right when raiding Apaches and renegade whites plague and plunder the miners and ranchers of Arizona! Pitted against evil outlaw forces, Bob Pryor fights against odds to smash an evil conspiracy..... 11

Short Stories

COMICAL AS A CLOWN.....**L. Ernenwein** 72

Close-shave Pelky of Broken Bow switches from barbering to acting when crooked promoters scheme to give his compadres a trimming

HIGH WHEELS ROLLING.....**Bascom Sturgill** 79

Grandpappy Jed and Button are new at fighting Injuns—but they still know a few tricks from feuding days back home in Kentucky

and

THE BUNKHOUSE.....**Foghorn Clancy** 6

A department conducted by America's foremost rodeo expert

Also See Portrait and Biography of General Nelson A. Miles, Page 31; Dr. John H. Holliday, Page 37, and John P. Cium, Page 41

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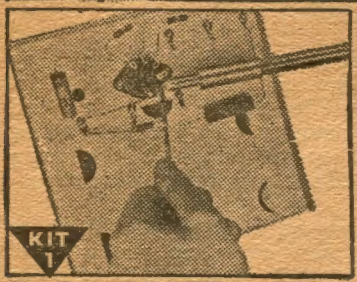

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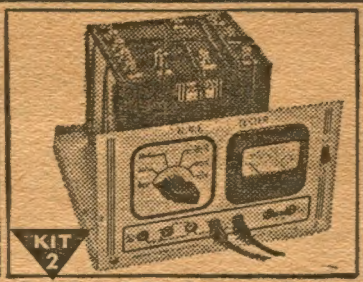

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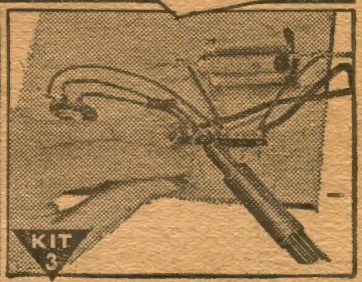

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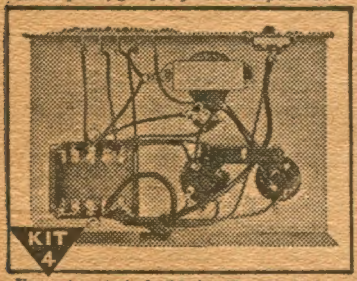

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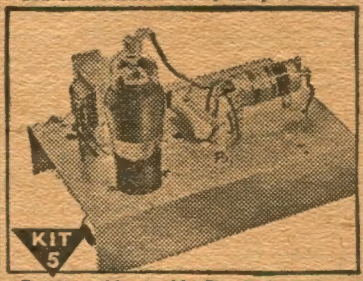

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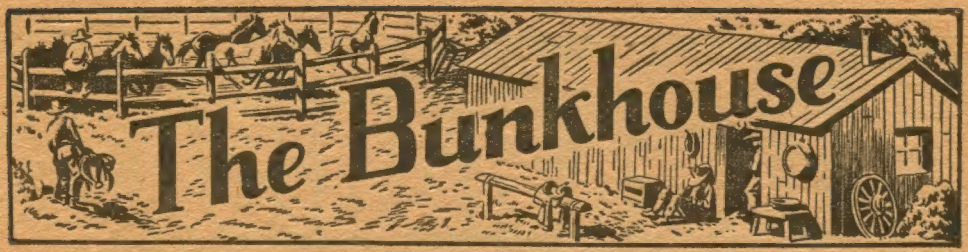

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TOP of a fine autumn morning to you, waddies. It sure has been a hot summer, but then summers are supposed to be hot, if not all over, in certain sections anyway. And after summer comes autumn, when a fellow is supposed to take a little relaxation or make it a little easier, especially if he has worked hard during the summer, just as the old-timers who trekked westward and were able to live through the dangers of that pioneer era, were, some of them, able to relax during the autumn of their lives.

Soon the fires will be lit in the fireplaces of the ranch houses, and in the homes that were once the homes of the pioneers. Around those fireplaces on some wintry night, there are apt to gather family groups and perhaps neighbors and friends. The head of each family, or perhaps grandma or grandpa, is likely to tell stories of the days when the West was young.

Children are always interested when there are stories of adventure, of gunplay, heroes and villains, melodramas of real life. If grandpa or grandma tells the story, it may be told first hand, because if they are old enough the West was young when they were. If it's dad or mom telling the story, it was handed down to them by their mother or father, but you can bet that it has lost none of its interest, none of its color. In fact the chances are that it has an added flavor.

Pioneers Are Modest

A peculiar thing about those few old time pioneers of the West who are still living is that in telling stories of battles or incidents that were fraught with danger, dramas of life where there were heroes and villains, they are always loud in their praise of some friend who took part in such incidents. They will tell of his bravery, of his true friendship. of his willingness to risk his life for a friend or even for a stranger who was not getting fair play, but they will not tell of their own brave deeds, will pretend to be just bystanders.

If pinned down on some specific thing he did, no matter how risky, no matter what kind of a heroic act it was he performed, the old-timer's answer will invariably be, "Oh that was nothing." It is that unassuming manner, that lack of bragging, that endears the old pioneers to those who listen to their fireside stories of adventure!

If it is dad or mom telling the story, you can bet that grandpa or grandma will get full credit for their deeds, will be hero or heroine, and you can't blame dad and mom. If my dad had matched his guns with some notorious gunman of the West, if he had chased Geronimo or captured Sitting Bull, I would want the world to know it. I would tell the story over and over and I would not leave out any little detail that would reflect credit upon my dad.

Heroes of the Early West

Many times I have listened to Jeff Milton, that grand old pioneer of Texas and Arizona, one of the first of the border patrol, a Deputy United States Marshal, a Deputy Sheriff, and a lawman who spent years chasing and catching bad men. Never once have I heard him elaborate on any of his deeds. I have heard him laud the bravery of Billy Breakenridge, Bat Masterson and other lawmen, I have heard him in telling of the mean and treacherous ways of many outlaws say, "He was a bad man, but you had to admire his

(Continued on page 8)

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THE BUNKHOUSE

(Continued from page 6)

bravery," and so it is with the real heroes of the days when the West was in the making.

There is one hero of the early West who has not been overly praised. It might be because his name was such as not to carry the impression of greatness like that of Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill Hickok, or Bat Masterson, but he is one of the few men who ever hanged a sheriff.

In a single month, January 1864, twenty-one men were hanged in Montana. Present at most of these final events was a man in a slouch hat, armed with a brace of pistols, a bowie knife, and a rifle noted for the deadliness of its aim. He was John X. Beidler, deputy U. S. Marshal. And back of him was one of the most effective vigilance committees of the old West.

At that time Henry Plummer was sheriff of Bannack City (now Idaho City) but secretly headed a band of 85 robbers. Even his deputies were members. To make it easy to identify one another, Plummer's men wore only mustaches and chin whiskers, unusual in that era of full beards. They also used special handclasps, and a password, "Innocent."

Riding swift horses stolen from the stage lines, these marauders ambushed prospectors, miners, and other likely looking travelers. Many a victim on a lonely trail or road found himself suddenly facing a shotgun muzzle, while behind it gleamed wicked eyes over a mask. Then failure to surrender his possessions meant death.

Montana Vigilantes

At first Beidler, like most of the citizens, did not suspect Sheriff Plummer, but several of his plans miscarried after being explained to Plummer in confidence. From then on he told Plummer nothing about the thousand vigilantes he had organized throughout Montana. Working quietly, these men checked the movements of everyone, and soon noted that several men with the same style beards disappeared before each robbery, and reappeared afterward.

Singly, and in small groups, these members of the Plummer gang were tracked down, seized, and hanged. Finally Red Yager, one of the band, confessed that Plummer was the chief. The false sheriff was promptly hanged, and on his person was found a roster of his organization. With this to guide them, the vigilantes made short work of the final cleanup. The remaining robbers retired promptly, either from or into the soil of Mon-

(Continued on page 89)

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The Rio Kid and Celestino fired together, their shots scorching into the Apaches (CHAPTER IV)

COPPER COMMANDMENTS

By LEE E. WELLS

The Rio Kid and his pard Celestino come a-ridin' to set things right when raiding Apaches and renegade whites plague and plunder the miners and ranchers of Arizona!

CHAPTER I

Indian Trouble

JUST beyond the boundaries of the San Carlos Indian Reservation, firelight played on the fantastically eroded walls of a canyon. It was a small fire, one which had been built furtively, and the men around it leaned forward, talking in low tones, interspersed with many signs.

Glittering Apache eyes rested avidly on the stacked carbines and the small whisky keg that stood to one side. Heavy red faces turned as the white man spoke in slow, painful Spanish, filling in with sweeping signs that made his meaning clear. His heavy voice was like a dangerous growl.

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"Here is what Eyes-Like-a-Rock promised. He believes you will keep your own word, Walik."

The Apache to whom he spoke grunted and nodded. His black eyes darted to his silent companions, squatting on their heeels around the fire. The sub-chief's coppery face lit up as again he looked at the new carbines.

"Walik has spoken true," he said. "Eyes-Like-a-Rock will know when Walik has struck at the mines and ranches south and west. Walik's warriors will use the rifles and the ammunition well. But first, Walik would have the firewater that you have brought."

"Yes," the white man said.

He stood up, shifting his matched holsters down on his thick thighs. He signaled to a pinched-faced gunhawk who waited beside the keg.

"You do this work good, Walik," he went on in his halting Spanish, "and there will be much more whisky and many rifles for you. Remember, you are not to leave a stick standing when you raid the Western Mining works. The fewer men you leave alive to talk, the better, too."

Walik stood up, squat and powerful. His lank hair framed his round face, and he was naked except for breech clout and high moccasins. His torso looked thick and powerfully muscled.

"Tell Eyes-Like-a-Rock that Walik hears and obeys," he rumbled. "We will slip out, strike, and be back in San Carlos before the white agents will know. They will be as one sleeping. Now Walik wants the little keg."

"It's yours," the white man chuckled, then spoke to the gunhawk in English. "Monte, I reckon you and me can ride out of here. Our job's done."

The two white men walked away from the fire as the Apaches crowded eagerly around the keg of whisky. It would not take long for the liquor to inflame them, and the buildings of the Western Mining Company lay just a few miles to the south. At dawn there would be another murderous attack, and smoke would rise from burning buildings to the clear Arizona sky. There would be mutilated dead men and a vanishing trail of the marauders.

The big white man let his thoughts linger on the picture as he rode away with his companion. He chuckled again, thick lips pulling back from strong yellow teeth. His companion said nothing, but rode along, a hunched shadow in the soft night. . . .

SEVERAL miles away, in the town of Globe, two men sat comfortably in a well-furnished room. Lamplight played along bottles and glasses on the table, close to their hands.

One man was large, well-dressed. The lamplight glinted from his red hair and made his face seem even more ruddy than it was naturally. His smile was wide and friendly, and with it the crowsfeet deepened around his green eyes, flecked with hazel. But a certain light in the eyes belied the humor and friendliness of his face. They were keen and boring, ruthless.

He adjusted the black string tie that adorned his white silk shirt.

"It's all fixed," he said complacently. "I've spent yore money the way yuh wanted it. So far as everyone knows, I'm the Mid-Arizona Copper Company."

"Good." The older man nodded. He squinted an eye and held his whisky glass up to the light, studying its golden color. "We stand to clean up, Stuart, if you play this right. You follow orders and there's nothing to stop us. I've got the dinero and you furnish the front."

"It's already workin'." The man called Stuart laughed. "I bought mineral rights to three ranches today. The owners was plumb scared of the Apaches and their raids. Our boys at San Carlos will keep things stirred up and the panic will grow worse. We'll pick up valuable property for a song."

"Ranches are not all we want, remember," the other man warned. "If we're to control the Globe copper deposits, we've got to force out some of the mining companies."

Stuart placed his glass on the table and arose. Broad shoulders quivered slightly as he laughed.

"You keep yore ears peeled. Yuh'll hear that Western Minin' has been raided up north. There'll be a heap of damage. A few killin's will make the workers for the other outfits nervous. In three months there won't

be a shaft workin' around Globe and yuh'll be able to buy at yore own price."

"I'm satisfied—so far."

Stuart's companion arose and escorted his visitor to the door. He cheeked Stuart there, his face tightening.

"Play it as you are," he said firmly, "but I'm not going to appear anywhere in the deal. Keep that in mind. And something else, Stuart. Don't have any idea you can drag me in. You'd be in Boot Hill before you could open your mouth."

"Boss, think I'd talk!" Stuart demanded, hurt.

The other man grunted. "Not now—things are going smooth. But if trouble comes up, don't plan on slipping out to leave me holding the sack. You'll never know when a bullet will find you. Right now you're doing fine, Stuart. I don't think anything will go wrong. That's why I picked you. Good night."

He opened the door and Stuart walked out into the dark night. He strolled away from the house, with a swagger in his wide shoulders. A block away he slowed, stopped, and turned around. For a time he watched the lighted window, his full lips pursed thoughtfully. He shivered a little, but quickly suppressed it.

"I think yuh'd do just what yuh said," he half-whispered. He turned abruptly and walked away, jaunty again. "Shucks! Ain't nothin' goin' wrong. I got everything figgered out. . . ."

BOB PRYOR

Three days later the news reached Tucson of another bloody raid in the Globe district. On the heels of it, General Nelson A. Miles rather curtly requested the presence of the Indian Agent, John Clum, at his headquarters.

Clum had expected the call, but still it angered him. He paced back and forth in front of the desk where the general sat.

Clum was a tall man, a bit thin. His sharp, angular face was so dark with anger that his

black mustache fairly quivered. He passed his hand nervously over his bald head and whirled on his heel.

"Blast it, General!" he flared. "You can't blame my men at the reservation for this. I'll swear by ever manjack of them. There's no whisky or any rifles going into San Carlos!"

"I wish I could believe that, John," Miles said regretfully. "Not that I doubt your word, but someone is arming those Apaches. Someone is seeing to it that they get firewater. That means that San Carlos is not closely enough patrolled."

Clum suppressed an oath and circled the desk to a large map of the Arizona Territory behind Miles. His finger jabbed at an irregular green square. Globe was marked just a bit below and to one side of it. Clum glared at the officer.

"That's San Carlos, and that's a heap of territory. You can't watch every square inch of its boundaries. I defy you to do it with the whole United States Army! Maybe the Apaches are getting contraband, but they're getting it from the outside. But I doubt even that. I say Geronimo's somewhere in this mix-up."

"Not Geronimo."

MILES shook his head. He thoughtfully brushed his sweeping mustache as he studied the map. Clum made an impatient gesture and returned to his pacing before the desk. Miles didn't turn but his calm eyes considered the map. At last he swung around and rested his arms on the desk.

He was a stocky man, broad-shouldered. The dark blue uniform of the Army fitted him as though he had been poured into it.

"Sit down, John," he said, "and let's see what we can figure out of this. We can't get anywhere just blowing up and losing our heads."

"Every time something goes wrong," Clum exclaimed from the window, his fist pounding the sill, "the Indian Agency catches the blame! I've done more with those Apaches than anyone else ever has. They hold their own courts, keep themselves in line. They're not beggars, but proud men who earn their own living. They have their own police force. The Army—"

"Accusations don't answer the problem, John," Miles said gently. "The Army's made mistakes, and will make more. At the moment we've got a job on our hands. For your information, Geronimo's below the Border in Mexico, with his Yaqui friends."

"He's slippery," Clum growled and glanced at the map. "He could be up around San Carlos, stirring up trouble."

"He's not," Miles said with finality, "and I'll gamble my stars on it. No, John, it's something else. Either someone in your agency organization is letting things slip through, or someone on the outside wants trouble up in San Carlos."

"It's not my boys. I'll back 'em to the limit."

"That's your way, John," the general sighed. Then he smiled. "I'm proud of you for it. But will you check over your men up there? Make certain, John, and don't leave yourself out on a limb."

"I'll check," John Clum growled, "but it'll do no good."

"I came from Globe," Miles said, "a day or two before this raid on the Western Mining outfit. I'm sending more troops up there and I'm taking personal command. If I can be sure of the men of the Indian Agency, I won't have to worry about that aspect."

"You can be sure," Clum snapped.

Miles passed his hand wearily over his face and looked at the map again.

"Why is the trouble up around Globe? Geronimo's south. There are stray bands of raiders in the Dragoons, but San Carlos has always been dependable."

"Why does Indian trouble break out anywhere?" Clum demanded, but Miles refused to answer the question.

"Copper is newly discovered up around Globe and companies have moved in," the General said. "They've bought lands and have machinery, equipment, buildings worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. The whole community lives on copper, and ranching. If the Apache raids cripple the mines and the ranches, you know what will happen to the area."

"I know," Clum said heavily, frowning out the window.

"Breck Long is head of the association of mining companies up there. He was in to see me two days ago. They're worried, John, and I don't blame them. This last raid not only cost lives, but cost some company plenty of money. Ranchers are abandoning their spreads, and it'll grow worse if nothing is done. Who is stirring up this trouble, John, and why?"

As the bottle in the Rim Kid's hand was smashed into a thousand glittering fragments, instantly he crouched, hands dropping to his holsters (CHAPTER IX)

Clum looked blanked, then startled. He leaned forward and his voice lowered.

"You're hinting that someone is doing it deliberately?"

"Of course," Miles said, his voice clipped and sure. "There's a deliberate plan to the way these raids are carried out. It's unmistakable. They all follow a pattern, and any witnesses who might give us pertinent details or descriptions of the raiders have been ruthlessly exterminated—and not in pleasant fashion. These raiders are taking no chances. And loot and plunder doesn't seem to be all they're after. As I told you. Someone is arming these Apaches, and setting them crazy with contraband firewater."

"And so you think San Carlos is to blame," Clum said, "and that rifles and whiskey are going into the reservation despite all the precautions I take?"

"Just that!" Miles cut in, fist smacking on his desk. "I'll watch every angle outside of the reservation. You check inside. You'll need someone who isn't known to your men. Can you get a person like that?"

"Darrell Duppa," Clum said instantly. "He's English, but he's lived with the Apaches. He can slip into San Carlos and you couldn't tell him from an Indian."

"Just the man!" Miles exclaimed. He arose and extended his hand. "I appreciate your cooperation, John. We've got to whip this right away or Globe will disappear. I'll take care of the other angles."

Clum took the officer's hand, then rammed a high-crowned Stetson on his head. Instantly he looked years younger. He walked out of the room and strode along the hall, sharp face wrinkled in thought. Outside, on the edge of the parade ground, he stopped and watched a troop of cavalry at maneuvers.

"Maybe Miles will find the trouble," he thought, "and maybe he won't. A uniform can make sidewinders duck for cover. Duppa can handle things inside San Carlos, but—"

He frowned across the sun-blasted parade ground, unmindful of the dust cloud that enveloped him. He snapped his fingers and his eyes lighted.

"The Rio Kid!" he breathed.

He turned sharply to the left and strode to his horse. Swinging into saddle he rode toward distant Tucson, shoulders back, a new and more hopeful look in his eyes.

That night a letter started for distant Texas.

CHAPTER II

Double Offer

THREE weeks later, two riders came toward Tucson from the southeast. They showed the strain of the long trails up from Texas. One man rode a dun horse with a mirled eye, a spirited animal with the long black stripe down the back of "the breed that never dies". The man himself was tall, with broad shoulders and long arms. He rode like a trained cavalryman, as indeed he once had been.

For four years Captain Bob Pryor had fought in the War between the States. He had seen service in almost every theater, from Virginia to the hard and bloody campiagns along the Mississippi River. He had come from the Rio Grande district of Texas and had soon won recognition as an invaluable scout. Generals Sherman, Dodge and Grant were glad to call him friend.

For four long and bloody years Bob Pryor had dreamed of his return to his parents' home along the Rio Grande. But that was not to be. For renegade guns had killed his father and mother, and outlawry reigned along the Rio Grande. On his return he had taken the trail of the killers and his fast guns had brought them to justice. After that he had roamed the West, the implacable foe of evil and injustice. Word of him had spread.

The Rio Kid, as he now was called, was deadly fast and accurate with six-gun or rifle. At the moment, two heavy sixes hung at his hips and a rifle rode in the saddle boot. A gray Stetson, resembling a cavalryman's campaign hat, shaded his clean-cut, lean face and keen blue eyes. Wide lips topped a strong chin and jaw.

His shirt was blue, filmed now with trail dust. His trousers, blue, with the broad yellow stripe of the cavalry down the sides, were stuffed into spurred, high-heeled boots.

His companion lifted the Mexican sombrero he wore and passed his hand across his dark face.

"Hola, General!" he exclaimed. "Tucson she ees good to see, eh?"

"It means a rest anyhow," the Rio Kid answered, with a tired smile. "Don't look to

be much trouble here, Celestino."

The young Mexican, Celestino Mireles, eloquently shrugged slender shoulders which were covered by a short, dust-stained jacket.

"Por Dios," he said. "John Clum he not write jus' so he spend the time. No, General, trouble ees here. She always hide maybe when you look for her. Then—*zzt!*—she's jump when you don't look."

The Rio Kid laughed and nodded. He knew Celestino Mireles so well. Several years before he had rescued the youth from death at renegade hands. Since then, the high-born young Mexican had been his constant trail companion.

Celestino was a trifle shorter then the Rio Kid but in his slender body supple muscles flowed along the shoulders beneath the open-throated shirt and short jacket. He wore tight trousers that flared out at the bottoms. A heavy gun-belt circled his waist, buckled over his wide red sash. His face was olive-colored, the cheekbones high. His dark eyes were quick and alert and his lips seemed always ready to smile. His saddle was decorated in the florid Mexican style, and the gray horse he bestrode showed power and stamina.

The two men rode steadily past the first scattered adobes of Tucson and entered the town. The Rio Kid had been here before and knew the place, so headed directly for the Indian Agency office. They passed a few cantinas and pulled up before a long adobe, swinging stiffly out of their saddles.

A few yards away, a man leaning against a wall lit a cigarette. For a moment, narrowed, muddy eyes rested on the two arrivals and he watched them enter the agency. Then he flipped his match into the street, straightened, and hurried away.

In the next block, he entered the low door of a cantina, gave a swift glance over the crowded room. His eyes lit when he saw two men at a table in the rear. They looked up swiftly when he approached.

"He's come," the man said. "Just rode in, him and a Mexican."

The eyes of the red-headed man who sat at the table brightened, and he rubbed his palms together.

"Good," he said. "When he gets to his hotel, we'll get busy."

"Yuh're playin' it wrong, Red," his table companion said. He was a tall, gaunt man with a cadaverous face and eyes as chill as two pieces of ice. "Yuh'll never get the Rio Kid to swing yore way."

"Yuh don't savvy, Doc," said the man called "Red". "We want no trouble if we can avoid it. If I can slap our brand on the Rio Kid, then there won't be any snoopin' up at San Carlos and Globe. That's the way the boss wants it handled."

"The boss," "Doc" said, with a touch of disgust, "don't know the Rio Kid. I've met him, at Abilene and Dodge. Yuh'd better let me try gunsmoke on him—or set up a bush-whack. It's the only way yuh'll get rid of him."

STUART'S fingers drummed on the table irritably. "I foller orders, Doc, and I reckon you will, too. No gunplay unless it's forced on us." He glanced up at the messenger who slouched against the table. "Get back on the job. Let me know when he comes out and where he goes. I'll be right here."

In the meantime, the Rio Kid and Celestino sat wearily before John P. Clum's desk, while the Indian Agent outlined the trouble up at San Carlos. When he mentioned General Miles, and the suggestion that the Agency might be at fault, Clum's eyes darkened and his fist clenched.

"It's not the Agency, or any man in it, I'm sure of that," he insisted. "There is someone getting arms, ammunition and fire-water to the Apaches up there and I want to nail the man's hide to the Agency building pronto."

"Any idea?" the Rio Kid asked.

Clum sighed and helplessly spread his hands.

"None, and I've checked everything."

"Heap of land up around Globe," the Rio Kid said thoughtfully, "and ranchers have been movin' in there for several years. Reckon somebody has got land fever?"

"That might be," Clum said doubtfully, "but no rancher up in that district could afford the cost of arming the Apaches and keeping 'em stirred up. No, we've got to look somewhere else. I've thought of the new copper deposits and the companies which have moved in."

The Rio Kid reflectively rubbed his hand along his lean jaw.

"Yuh might have a lead there, John."

"I don't think so. I know most of those managers and executives. Mining is a cut-throat game, I admit, but it won't explain this Apache trouble. Everything's being hit

up there, Pryor—mines, ranches, travelers. My men at the reservation and the Apache Scouts are driving themselves ragged to keep things under control. It's got me whipped."

"Sounds bad," the Rio Kid admitted.

"I wrote you because I need your help," Clum said simply. "I can't give you any leads if you take this job. It'll be tough and I reckon it will be dangerous enough. Will you take it?"

Celestino stirred and his dark eyes gleamed toward the Rio Kid. He smiled slightly and suggestively rubbed his holster. The Rio Kid frowned, his sharp brain probing at the angles of the problem.

"Yuh want me to go up to San Carlos?"

"No," Clum cut in. "I've got an undercover man up there now—Darrell Duppa. He'll turn up anything rotten in the Agency itself. I don't believe the trouble's there. It must be in Globe, or just outside San Carlos' boundaries. That's where you come in. Find out what you can and report to me. In turn, I'll keep you in touch with what I learn myself and through Duppa. Both of us will keep in contact with you."

"Globe—and copper," the Rio Kid said softly. "Heap of dinero in copper, and I've got a hunch the trail will lead there."

"Then you'll take it?" Clum demanded.

"I never turn down a friend, John," the Rio Kid said simply. "I'll rest up in Tucson and do some inquirin' around town before I head north. I'll be in Globe within a week."

Clum's face lighted. He arose and circled the desk, extending his hand.

"I don't know how to thank you, Pryor."

"No thanks are due, John. You know that. How about General Miles? I'm shore to meet him in Globe and he might ask some questions."

"Suit yourself about that," Clum answered. "You can tell him about the investigation or keep your mouth shut, whichever seems best. I trust your judgment the whole way, and I know you'll do the job."

"At least my best," the Rio Kid answered. He put on his hat and smiled at Celestino. "You named it, amigo. Let's go out and find Senorita Trouble."

"She is wait." Celestino laughed, and followed the Rio Kid out the door.

They swung into saddle and neck-reined their horses, riding only a block to the hotel. They saw to their horses, then registered and were shown immediately to a room in the rear of a small but pleasant patio. The Rio Kid placed his rifle and bedroll in a corner, then poured water from the pitcher into the flowered bowl. The cool water felt good against his face after the long, hard hours in the saddle.

HE HAD finished cleaning up, and Celestino stood blowing and sputtering at the bowl when a knock sounded on the door. The Rio Kid arose from the bed where he lay, fully clothed. Celestino dashed the water from his eyes and his hand dropped to his holstered gun as the Rio Kid opened the door. A stranger stood there, smiling, hand extended.

"Yuh're Captain Pryor?" he asked.

He was as tall as the Rio Kid but he ran to beef and brawn while Bob Pryor was all supple, steel muscles. The man's face was sunburned a fiery red that faded off to half moons of white beneath the hazel-flecked green eyes. His nose was hooked, broad at the bridge. The lips were full, but there was a hint of oiliness in the smile that the Rio Kid instantly noticed. Curly red hair clung close to the high, beet-red forehead. A white shirt covered the barrel chest that tapered down to a slim waist encircled by a gun-belt. His voice was deep, unctuous.

"My name's Stuart—David Stuart," he said. "Most folks call me Red. I heard yuh were in town."

The Rio Kid's brows arched.

"I only just got here."

"When a gent as famous as you comes, everyone knows it right away." Stuart laughed, then quickly sobered. "I'd like to talk to yuh on a business proposition, Pryor. I represent the Mid-Arizona Copper Corporation and I think I have somethin' that'll interest yuh."

"Such as?" the Rio Kid asked shortly.

"A job with us—and a good one. I'll explain it now or later, whichever yuh like."

"Make it later, Mr. Stuart," the Rio Kid answered. "I'm just off the trail and mighty tired."

"I understand. Make it tonight then and yuh'll find my office right down the street. I'll look for yuh."

He shook hands, smiled again, and walked off down the hall. The Rio Kid closed the door softly and turned, leaning against it. Celestino watched him, eyes narrowed, lips thoughtfully pursed. The Rio Kid grinned widely at his friend.

"Looks like somebody's on the job mighty

sudden, or they had word Clum had sent for us."

"Thees Senor Stuart, he's maybe *muy malo?*"

"Figger it out." The Rio Kid chuckled and held up his hand, ticking off the points on his fingers. "There's new copper discoveries up around Globe and a heap of companies are eager to mine it. But the Apache trouble is tyin' 'em up, burnin' and shootin' everything in sight. Stuart represents Mid-Arizona Copper. We just get in town. We talk to Clum and come here, just about an hour gone. Why should Stuart offer me a job now, unless he figgers Clum is callin' for help?"

"*Quien sabe?*" Celestino shrugged. "But how does thees one know we have come? How he know that Senor Clum need us?"

"I'd like to savvy that myself, and I bet yuh a peso Clum would, too. Amigo, Clum's right. There's more'n Apaches behind this deal, and the first play has been made. We'll talk to Senor Stuart tonight."

CHAPTER III

Threat

IT WAS after dark when the Rid Kid and Celestino left the hotel and wandered slowly down the street. The sky was clear and the moon cast a silver glow on the blank adobe walls. Light alternated with deep shadow. Splashes of yellow streamed out across the dusty street from cantina doorways and store windows. Men moved silently along the street like flitting shadows.

Not far from the hotel, the Rio Kid made inquiries about Red Stuart and was directed to a small adobe. The blinds were pulled and only a crack of light appeared from under them.

Stuart instantly answered the Rio Kid's knock and admitted him to an office that was almost bare. A desk, swivel chair, and three straight-backs inventoried the furniture.

Stuart made Celestino and the Rio Kid comfortable, then poured drinks around. He was genial and his wide smile constantly flashed in the lamplight. At last he placed his empty glass on the desk and leaned forward.

"I won't waste any time, Pryor," he said. "Yuh're famous all over the West and just the man we want for the job we have in mind."

"Doin' what?"

"Private lawman and trouble-shooter for Mid-Arizona holdin's. Yuh can practically name yore own salary."

"Sounds like yuh got a heap of properties," the Rio Kid commented. "But I didn't know there was copper around Tucson."

"Up in Globe." Stuart laughed easily, but his eyes narrowed shrewdly. The Rio Kid showed no surprise and Stuart looked puzzled. "Mebbe yuh heard talk about Globe sometime today?"

"Might be," the Rio Kid said. "How much property yuh got up there?"

"At the moment, only a little," Stuart answered readily. "But there's money and power behind us. We plan to be the biggest minin' outfit in that part of the country and we've already bought several promising claims. There's some Apache trouble up there but we figger the Army will have that whipped before long."

"I don't savvy why yuh need me," the Rid Kid said. "Yuh must have workers and guards at yore mines. Seems like yuh're puttin' out wages before yuh need to."

Stuart made an easy, wide gesture.

"Pryor, I reckon everybody knows about yore gun speed. Yuh're in Tucson and I got a chance to hire yuh now. Mebbe later yuh'll have another job with somebody else. Besides, there's always use for a good pair of guns in the copper game."

"I don't hire my guns to just any gent that comes along," the Rio Kid snapped. "That way yuh never know how yuh might have to use 'em."

"Don't worry." Stuart leaned back and smiled. He poured more drinks around, and grinned slyly. "No use jokin' yuh, Pryor. Sometimes a company has to shut its eyes to certain things. We have a man for that, and a good one. Yuh'll meet him shortly. But yore job will be honest and open."

The Rio Kid glanced at Celestino. The young Mexican was watching Stuart closely and there was a slight frown between his eyes. The Rio Kid felt certain that Red Stuart and this Mid-Arizona Company fitted into the puzzle at Globe. The more he could draw Stuart out, the more he might learn

about the situation at Globe and the mines.

"Just what is yore position?" he asked abruptly.

"I'm in charge of operations and promotions," Stuart said, and smiled. "I can promise yuh I have full authority to hire any man I want—or fire him, for that matter."

"Then yuh take orders from somebody else?"

"As all executives do," Stuart said hastily. "I have to give an account to the stockholders."

"Yuh want me to go to Globe and just set around?"

"That's all yuh'll do at first," Stuart answered. His jaw grew hard and his whole face subtly changed into harsh lines that gave him an ugly, predatory look. "But yuh'll earn yore pay, Pryor. You can take my word for that."

"How about my friend, Celestino?"

"He's hired with yuh," Stuart answered readily.

The Rio Kid crossed his legs and frowned at the far wall.

"How about the Apaches up around Globe?" he asked.

Stuart shrugged.

"They'll not bother yuh or the Mid-Arizona. I can promise yuh that. Remember, the Army is already up there."

A SLIGHT tap sounded on the door and Red Stuart stood up. He hurried across the room and opened the door. A man stepped in, a man who looked like a living skeleton. His eyes, wide and gray, sat deep in his skull. His cheeks were sunken and so long that the jawbone seemed barely covered by unhealthy skin. A sweeping mustache covered the bloodless lips that were thin and constantly twisted as though the man had never known a moment without pain or illness. His arms were long, the hands tapering and soft.

He pushed back his broad-brimmed hat and hooked his thumbs into the double gunbelt that circled his waist. He smiled briefly at the Rio Kid but his eyes remained cold and fishlike. His voice was soft, controlled to a low monotone that had all the warmth of a threatening Colt.

"Howdy, Rio Kid. Ain't seen yuh since Dodge."

"Yuh know Doc Holliday?" Stuart demanded, but the Rio Kid didn't think he was as surprised as he pretended to be.

"Met him in Dodge and Abilene." The Rio Kid nodded. "Thought you and Wyatt Earp was in Tombstone, Doc. Heard yuh kicked up a heap of dust down there."

"Wyatt's there," Doc answered evenly. He came into the room and sank into the single empty chair. "I got tired of Tombstone and took me a job with excitement and travel."

"Doc Holliday's the trouble-shooter I mentioned, Pryor," Stuart said heartily. "If yuh know him, then yuh needn't worry about takin' the gunslammin' jobs that might come along. Doc can handle anything he meets or anybody that wears guns."

"That's right." Doc sighed and coughed. He studied the Rio Kid, speculation showing

Celestino Mireles

in his eyes. "I've never bucked up against yuh, Rio Kid. In Dodge I was sidin' with the law with Wyatt, and so was you. I always wondered which of us was fastest with a six."

Doc Holliday was probably the most dangerous gunslinger in the Arizona Territory. He had been an Eastern dentist but had contracted lung trouble and the doctors had bluntly told him that in the West he probably could stretch out his life. So Holliday had drifted West, following the railroads which were being built through the tough towns of Kansas.

There he had met and befriended Wyatt Earp, a gun master in his own right. Doc

had taken to the six-gun. Without hope that he could live long anyway, Doc handled his Colts with chilling precision. He took long chances, seeming to invite death. It passed him by. He now could cut a long string of notches in his guns, and apparently his health did not grow worse.

Gunsmoke followed him from Dodge to Abilene, across Kansas and into Oklahoma, the Panhandle, New Mexico to Arizona. Now he sat slumped in the chair, half challenging the Rio Kid to a showdown.

"No need for that, Doc," Stuart cut in, horrified. "Pryor's goin' to work for us up in Globe."

"I ain't shore of that yet, Stuart," the Rio Kid answered as he arose. "I got to think over what yuh said. There's another proposition I got to consider."

"John Clum," Doc said wearily. He shrugged slightly. "I knew yuh was comin' and watched yuh ride in, Rio Kid. Yuh see what we can do when—"

"Doc!" Stuart snapped.

Holliday's chill eyes lifted lazily, and he stared directly at Stuart. He laughed drily.

"Yuh'd better take this deal," he said to the Rio Kid.

"There's things I don't like about it."

"Yuh always was a little tin god," Doc said softly. "Mid-Arizona will keep yuh healthy—so long as yuh're on the payroll."

"Meanin'?" the Rio Kid asked coldly.

"Like I said," Doc answered, "you and me ain't never faced one another. We worked together once and we might again. But if yuh go to Globe for John Clum, yuh never can tell what will happen."

The Rio Kid arose and looked from Holliday to Red Stuart. Celestino waited, tense, sensing the trouble that was almost tangible in the room.

The Rio Kid smiled lazily.

"Well, I haven't made up my mind. If I take yore offer, I'll be around."

"If not?" Stuart asked.

"I'll be in Globe. Seems like that town needs lookin' over, what with Apache trouble and a minin' company that plans to buy a heap of claims. Might be interestin'."

"Might be dangerous," Stuart answered, and smiled.

Doc Holliday made a languid gesture with his hand.

"I almost hope yuh turn us down, Rio Kid. That way, I'd know about yore sixes. . . ."

THE Rio Kid remained in Tucson the following day. He did not go again to Clum's office, but he and Celestino wandered about the town. From freighters, cowboys and loafers in the cantinas they learned a few things about the copper district up around Globe.

It was new, and several companies were already there and working mines—at least they had been until the Apache raids had forced the workers into Globe for their own protection. Mid-Arizona was hardly known, a newcomer. The company had plenty of money and whispers and rumors hinted at a powerful and ruthless group behind it.

The more the Rio Kid heard, the more certain he became that Stuart and Doc Holliday held the keys to the problem. But to expose them would not be enough. The Rio Kid wanted to make sure of the mysterious figure behind them.

He checked the corporation records and found that the Mid-Arizona listed David Stuart, Doc Holliday and John Smith as owners. The Rio Kid pointed to the last name, lips grim.

"John Smith—that's the gent we want, Celestino. Let's ride pronto before Stuart knows we've left Tucson. It'll give us an extra day or two in Globe before he catches up with us."

They returned to the hotel, paid their bill, and slipped out the back way.

CHAPTER IV

The Girl in the Cabin

BY NIGHTFALL the two trail companions were miles out of Tucson, heading northward. As they approached Globe, the character of the country changed. They had left the wide, rolling expanse of the semi-arid country, and now they came into a broken area, wooded, cut up by ravines.

There were ranches and small farms up this way. Twice they stopped overnight at one of the ranches and the Rio Kid began to get a clear picture of the troubles around Globe.

"Trouble is," one leathery-faced cowboy

told the Rio Kid, "yuh never know when them red devils is goin' to strike. Yuh'd think the Government would keep 'em corralled at San Carlos, but looks like Apaches is a heap smarter'n the Injun Agent and sojers."

"Ranches hit?" asked the Rio Kid.

"Some," the cowboy admitted and he scratched his head. "But not what yuh'd figger. Seems like them Injuns has a plumb thirst for miners. I reckon that's because of the company stores at the mines. But that's just a guess. Yores is as good as mine."

The Rio Kid and Celestino rode on and at last were within a day's easy journey of Globe. They had just watered their horses and ridden less than a mile beyond the creek when the Rio Kid drew rein. He stiffened, looking down at the ground. Celestino pulled along side.

"Apaches," the Rio Kid said, pointing to tracks. "They're not far ahead of us."

"Small band," Celestino guessed shrewdly. He patted the rifle in the boot. "We not worry, eh?"

"Yuh always worry about Apaches," the Rio Kid said grimly. His keen eyes searched up the trail. Saber stamped impatiently, anxious to be on the move. "They can ambush yuh before yuh know it. Keep yore eyes sharp, amigo."

They moved on, riding more slowly. The Rio Kid losened his rifle and lifted his sixes, letting them drop gently back in the holster. For an hour or more there was no sign of Indians. The band had veered from the trail but the Rio Kid felt certain the Apaches were traveling roughly toward Globe, though they might turn off and head toward San Carlos to the northeast, or in some other direction, bent on pillage. More likely, they would lurk along the trail.

Suddenly the Rio Kid drew rein and listened. Celestino, a split second later, heard the sound of heavy rifle fire. He glanced at his "General," as he always called Bob Pryor.

"They've got something treed," the Rio Kid said briefly. "I reckon we'd better look into it."

Saber was more than eager to open up and the two men raced down the trail. The sound of the firing grew louder and at last seemed to come from beyond the next turn in the road. The Rio Kid felt a shiver go down Saber's black stripe, always a warning that danger was close.

He swung off the trail and spurred through a thin grove of trees. The firing continued steadily to his left and he could hear Celestino pounding close behind him. At last the Rio Kid pulled Saber to a sliding halt and vaulted from saddle. His rifle slithered out of the boot and he levered a shell into the chamber.

Celestino needed no instructions. He dismounted and moved up beside the Rio Kid as he headed for the top of the ridge. Just below its crest, they threw themselves flat and crawled the remaining distance.

They looked down on a shallow valley and a group of low log buildingss. High grass covered the valley almost to the ranchhouse door. The Rio Kid's eyes narrowed as he saw a sprawled shape lying before the log barn.

As he looked he saw the grass move and a puff of gunsmoke marked an Apache warrior. The Rio Kid caught a glimpse of coppery skin, then his eyes jerked to the other side of the house as two rifles spat from a clump of bushes. The Apaches were past masters in keeping themselves hidden.

Only one rifle answered from the house itself. The Rio Kid could easily picture what had happened. The attack had come without warning and one man had been caught at the barn. A second one had been fortunate enough to be in the house and quick-thinking enough to slam and bar the door. His position, however, was hopeless unless help came. The Apaches had drawn a tight ring around the house and, even as the Rio Kid watched, they drew it tighter.

"We'd better take a hand," he said quietly to Celestino. "Make yore shots count."

THE MEXICAN grinned, then cuddled his rifle to his cheek, lining it down on a minute coppery speck he could see in the valley. The Rio Kid set his sights on the distant clump of bushes. They fired together.

The Rio Kid levered swiftly and sent three more shots scorching into the bushes.

Three Apaches jumped up and fled, and the Rio Kid brought one of them down in a threshing heap. Celestino's target jerked spasmodically and lay still. The grass and bushes fairly erupted Apaches, squat, coppery men wearing only head-bands, breach clouts and legging-moccasins that came halfway to their knees.

Instantly Apache guns turned toward the ridge and bullets sang high over the Rio Kid's head. At a touch, Celestino dropped back below the ridge and the two men ran,

crouching, to another position. Once more they edged up to the crest.

The Indians had dropped under cover again, but their attention had been turned from the ranch. The Rio Kid saw a dozen of them start wriggling up toward the ridge where he and Celestino had been a moment before. He grinned at his friend.

"Settin' rabbits, amigo. Let's give 'em another surprise."

The two rifles roared and blasted. The man in the ranchhouse joined in and his shooting was accurate and deadly. Four Indians dropped lifeless and the rest scattered. In less than a minute there was no sign of them in the valley. They had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed them.

The Rio Kid did not move. His eyes narrowed and he searched every spot where a man might hide. He was certain the Apaches had not withdrawn. By now they would know that only two new rifles had joined the battle. The Rio Kid counted six silent coppery forms sprawled in the grass and he figured that there were at least a dozen more live and dangerous Apaches about.

A movement at the ranchhouse door caught his attention. He saw it open and cursed under his breath. The man must know little about Apaches to expose himself that way. Suddenly Celestino grabbed his arm.

"*Madre de Dios!* That ees a woman!"

The Rio Kid lifted his rifle and took quick aim. He fired and his bullet struck the logs high above the girl's head. She ducked back inside and the door slammed.

"She's a brave girl," the Rio Kid muttered, "but a plumb foolish one. She'll figger that was Indian shootin'. Mebbe she'll keep low till we're shore them devils are gone."

Silence once more settled on the valley. Celestino watched for any sign of the Indians along the near side of the ridge up which they had come. The Rio Kid searched the valley itself. At last Celestino stirred uneasily.

"Surely they are gone, General. We have not heard a sound."

"Mebbe. Yuh never can tell. Let's start workin' toward the house. Keep yourself low."

They moved cautiously down the slope,

Nooses dropped silently from the rim over the Rio Kid and Celestino, and were jerked tight (CHAPTER XIII)

using each bit of cover. For a short time the Apaches kept quiet. There was neither sound nor movement from the ranchhouse as the Rio Kid and Celestino halted behind a thick line of bushes. Ahead of them, the only cover to the house was the high grass, and it would not give much protection.

The Rio Kid searched back along the ridge. He caught a flick of movement and he knew the Indians had not gone.

"No use to crawl through that grass," he said to Celestino. "The Apaches could pick us off."

"*Si*, General. Maybe thees girl she have open the door for us?"

"It'll be hot for us if she don't," the Rio Kid replied.

He drew his six from the holster, holding his rifle in his left hand. He came to a crouch, like a sprinter tensing for a race. Celestino grinned at him.

"I theenk maybe we run verree fast thees time."

"Ready? Here we go!"

The Rio Kid dashed from the protection of the bushes and raced toward the ranchhouse. Instantly the Apaches set up howls, and rifles blasted along the ridge. The Indians came streaking from cover, racing down. Two fleeing men in the open against fourteen made victory seem sure.

The Rio Kid's racing trail was erratic. Bullets cut the air around his head and slapped into the ground at his feet. The Apaches stopped firing and raced after their quarry, intent on closing with them before they reached the cabin. Celestino's sombrero sailed from his head and the Mexican pulled an extra burst of speed from his pumping legs.

The girl in the cabin came to life. Her rifle cracked with steady precision. An Indian pitched headlong, another tumbled and rolled, his leg smashed out from under him. The others hesitated, and so lost the race.

AS THE Rio Kid rocketed toward the cabin, the narrow door swung open. He dashed inside, Celestino close behind. Lead thudded into the door panels and the thick logs that formed the wall. The girl slammed the door and dropped a heavy bar into place.

The Rio Kid had only a glimpse of sky-blue eyes, a pert nose and a small chin set at a fighting angle. She turned instantly and shoved her rifle through a loophole. The Rio Kid moved to another and Celestino added his own rifle to the defense of the house.

They caught the Apaches in the open and downed three more before the Indians could race back to cover. The man with the broken leg painfully and silently pulled himself up the ridge and finally disappeared. Once more silence and a false peace settled over the valley. The Rio Kid spoke without turning his head.

"I'm Bob Pryor, the Rio Kid. This is my friend, Senor Mireles. Looks like we came just in time."

"Not quite," she answered in a clear voice that suddenly caught in a sob. "They killed Father. I'm Rae Heaton."

"You're a brave girl," the Rio Kid said in honest admiration. "I doubt if our red friends bother us any more today."

"They're gone?" she asked.

"No, but they won't make any more direct attacks. They've lost too many as it is. So long as we keep under cover, we're not in much danger."

"But Father—" she began, then sobbed.

"Nothin' more can happen to him, Miss Heaton," the Rio Kid said gently. "Tonight Celestino and me will do what has to be done. Where's yore nearest neighbor?"

"Buck Nolan is twenty miles beyond the ridge."

"We'll go there tonight," the Rio Kid decided, "and take yuh to Globe in the mornin'."

The girl said nothing and the Rio Kid could not tell whether she approved of his plan or not. But it was too risky to leave her here alone, or at any of the small ranches that were subject to surprise Apache attack.

For an hour the three watched the bushes, grass, and sharp ascent of the valley wall. The Apaches did not show themselves. At last the Rio Kid pulled his rifle from the loophole and straightened.

"Like I figgered, they'll stay low and hope to pick us off if we step outside. Celestino, keep watch while I talk to Miss Heaton."

The young Mexican nodded. Rae Heaton wearily placed her rifle against the wall near the loophole and passed her hands slowly over her face.

Her calico dress was soiled and rumpled. Her corn-gold hair had been pulled back tightly from her high white forehead and fastened in a bun at the back of her neck. Red lips made her white skin seem even paler, and a row of freckles marched up over

the ridge of her nose and down to the other cheek. Tears lurked just under her eyelids and she could not wholly check the tremble of her lips.

"I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Pryor," she said. "My ammunition was running low and I couldn't have held the Apaches off much longer."

"No thanks due, ma'am. It's just lucky we happened along." He looked at her sharply, and saw that she needed something to do. "Mebbe yuh could rustle up some grub for Celestino and me," he suggested.

CHAPTER V

Buck Nolan

RAE HEATON gave the Rio Kid a grateful look and moved into the small kitchen that opened off the main room. In a moment the Rio Kid heard the rattle of pots and dishes. He moved over to Celestino, who glanced up, dark eyes clouded.

"General," the young Mexican said, "t h e e s Apache not show heemself. I theenk maybe I get a shot but—bah!—he's keep his head down."

"Don't underrate them boys, amigo," the Rio Kid answered. "They're the best fighters in the whole country."

In a few minutes Rae came in with plates of food for the Rio Kid and Celestino. There was hot black coffee in tin cups. She took Celestino's place at the loophole while he tackled the food.

The Rio Kid questioned her as he ate, and brought out her story bit by bit. Dan Heaton, her father, had brought Rae and her mother here from Missouri. Theirs was the usual story of pioneer hardships, and Rae's mother had been killed by an Apache arrow years ago, before the Indians had been placed on reservations. Since then Rae and her father, little by little, had steadily built up the spread.

"Now the Apaches have broken loose again," she said, sighing deeply as she stared unseeing at the far wall. "The Army can't control the small bands that slip away from San Carlos, like the ones outside. This isn't the only place that's been hit."

"What will yuh do now?" the Rio Kid asked gently.

"I'll keep the spread, like Father would want me to. Buck Nolan will help." She looked down at the floor. "Buck and I planned to get married next fall, after the work is all done."

"I'm glad to hear about Buck," the Rio Kid said. "The Frontier is no place for a girl to be alone. Yuh can combine the two spreads and have a mighty nice beginnin' for one of the biggest ranches in the Territory."

"Yes," Rae answered. Her voice caught. "Father was so excited about our plans. He acted like he was getting married again himself. Now—" She shrugged, suddenly turned and ran into the kitchen.

The two men heard her muffled sobbing. Celestino shifted uneasily and looked at the Rio Kid, jerking his thumb toward the kitchen. The Rio Kid shook his head. It was best that she get the tears out of her system. At last the sobbing stopped and Rae again appeared in the doorway. Her eyes were red-rimmed, but her chin angled stubbornly.

"When can we leave for Buck's?" she asked.

"Not before night. Apache's don't move around much in the dark for fear of the evil spirits and the ghosts of the dead. We can take a chance then, I reckon."

The afternoon slowly waned and at last the light faded out of the little valley. Not once did the Apaches show their hand, but the Rio Kid would take no chances. Rae lit the lamps and cooked another meal. They packed what few belongings she wanted to take, and the Rio Kid extinguished the lamps.

He opened the door and stepped out. The moon would be up in a little over an hour, but now there was only faint starlight. The three of them moved to the barn and the Rio Kid and Celestino carefully wrapped Dan Heaton's body in a blanket.

With spades from the barn they dug a grave, and another pioneer was laid to rest in the earth he had striven so hard to conquer. The job finished, the Rio Kid and Celestino moved into the barn, saddling a horse for Rae and turning the other one loose, should the Indians fire the structure next morning.

Rae remained silent and bowed beside the grave. The Rio Kid walked to the front of the house and sent a peculiar whistle keening into the night. He repeated the call and

then turned to Rae. She was ready to mount.

"Our hosses will be along in a minute," the Rio Kid said.

"But the Apaches?" Rae asked, surprised.

The Rio Kid cuhckled. "Saber will keep clear of 'em and he'll herd Celestino's hoss along. Any Injun that gets too close to Saber's hoofs will be feelin' mighty sorry for hisself about now—if he's able to think at all."

They heard hoofbeats and soon Saber came trotting up, nipping at Celestino's gray to keep the animal in line. In a moment the two trail companions mounted.

"Yuh'd best take yore last look," the Rio Kid suggested quietly to the girl. "It might be burned down the next time yuh see it. But remember yuh'll be back, Rae. Yuh'll make this place bigger and better than it ever was before—you and Buck."

Her voice was steady and low as she answered.

"I'll be back. I promised Father."

AT THE Rio Kid's quiet word they moved away from the house and headed toward the distant pass. The Rio Kid rode alert and tense. Just behind him came Rae Heaton, and Celestino brought up the rear. The Apaches would be encamped somewhere about, staying close to one another, the Rio Kid knew. But he also knew that they would probably select a spot for their bivouac that would cut off any retreat from the valley.

The cabin and barn faded into the shadows behind them. The ridges appeared dark and threatening, though no sound broke the deep silence. The three watched in every direction, Celestino's hands resting on his guns. Gradually the valley pinched in and the trail started to lift up into the low pass. This would be the critical point, the Rio Kid knew.

"Watch sharp," he warned in a low whisper.

"*Por Dios*, the eyes they pop out now," Celestino answered.

The walls of the pass pinched in and it was like walking into a black veil. Saber's head became dim, wavering. The Rio Kid could almost hear the girl and the Mexican breathe in the silence. Yard by yard they penetrated the pass and the Rio Kid began to hope there would be no alarm.

At that moment a shadowy shape appeared in the darkness. The Rio Kid's hand slashed down to his sixes as the Indian yelled a warning and jumped for Saber's bridle. The dun instantly wheeled, snorting, ears laid back. More Indians appeared in the night and the Rio Kid knew he had ridden into their camp.

As Saber wheeled and reared to strike at the Apache with steel-shod hoofs, the Rio Kid's six blasted. The Indian was smashed backward. Celestino cursed and his own gun thundered.

"Spur!" the Rio Kid yelled.

Saber sped away, Rae Heaton's mount thundering just behind. Celestino fired again and a leaping Apache collapsed. The dark walls rushed by on either hand. Angry Indian yells sounded behind them, but soon faded away. At last the canyon walls opened and the trail dropped into another valley. The Rio Kid reined Saber in. Rae and Celestino pulled up beside him.

"Yuh all right?" the Rio Kid demanded.

"They didn't get a chance to reach me," Rae said breathlessly.

The Mexican chuckled. "They are very surprise *Indios*, eh?" He listened to a distant sound and laughed aloud. "Santa Maria, but they have the stroke, they are so mad."

"They won't follow us," the Rio Kid said confidently, "for fear of the dark. But they know we're gone and they'll visit yore spread come daylight, Rae."

"It can't be helped," she said resignedly.

The three of them touched spurs to their horses and rode at a swift trot down the gentle slope. The trail led almost due north, then turned sharply to the east, into the heart of the wide valley. They had ridden for well over an hour when Rae turned into a side trail.

"This is Buck's road," she explained. "In daylight you could see the house from here."

In a short time they came to a gate and Rae called to the house. By the time they had entered the spacious ranchyard, lamps glowed in the main house. Men came into the yard.

"That you, Rae?" a deep voice called. "Somethin' wrong?"

A man came to the door, holding a lamp. The light fell aslant his thick brows, high cheekbones and bony nose. He was young, and powerfully built.

Other men came up close to the riders, three of them, their eyes curious and worried.

"Apaches raided us, Buck," Rae called. "They killed Father and trapped me in the

cabin. If it hadn't been for Mr. Pryor and his friend, I might be dead, too."

"Dan's dead!"

"Buck" Nolan took a deep breath that pushed out his barrel chest. He came into the yard and helped Rae down from saddle. He held her close, looking over her head at the Rio Kid.

"I certainly have yuh to thank, mister," he said and shoved out a giant hand. "Them Injuns still around?"

"I think so. They know we're gone and they'll rob the spread come mornin'."

"Saddle up, hombres," Buck Nolan called to his men, "and get yore sixes and rifles. There's a bunch of Apaches need a lesson." He asked the Rio Kid, "Want to go back?"

"I'll help. If we can get an Apache prisoner, there's a heap of questions I'd like to ask him."

"Won't be much chance," Buck snapped, then said soberly. "We all thought a heap of Dan Heaton. Yuh can depend on them red devils comin' when yuh least expect it."

HE LED Rae to the house and remained inside with her for about ten minutes. When he came out, he wore his gun-belt and carried a rifle. One of the men had roped and saddled his horse. Buck swung into leather and led the way out of the ranchyard without a word.

As they rode the length of the valley, Buck Nolan asked the Rio Kid the probable location of the Apaches. The Rio Kid described the dark camp in the mouth of the pass and Buck nodded, pleased.

The more the Rio Kid saw of this young rancher, the better he liked him. Buck was forthright and blunt. It showed in the craggy set of his jaw and in the clipped way in which he spoke. His gray eyes were direct and open, fearless in the manner in which they looked out upon the world. His full, wide mouth was now set in a grim, straight line but the Rio Kid sensed it could smile with genuine warmth and friendship.

Buck's shoulders were enormous, wide, sloping into a deep chest that fairly strained at the fabric of his shirt. The torso tapered down to a slender waist. His legs and arms were muscular. He was a man completely fitted to meet the tests and rigors of frontier country.

Just before they climbed into the pass, Buck drew rein and the others came in close around him. He looked up at the moon, smaller now and riding high. The pass itself was black, untouched by the silvery light and as silent as a sepulcher.

"Them Apaches will be stickin' close together, plumb scared of their ancestors' ghosts," Buck said, shoving his hat back and revealing thick dark hair. "They'll have moved their camp by now but they won't be far off. They'll be watchin' this way for trouble and keepin' an eye on the Heaton ranch, plumb lickin' their chops at the thought of the loot they'll get."

"Sounds reasonable," the Rio Kid agreed. "I'll scout ahead."

He moved silently off before Buck could stop him. He used every shadow and moved as silently as the very ghosts the Apaches feared. Coming into the pass, he dismounted and crept ahead, every sense alert. Edging forward, fairly feeling his way, he worked deeper into the black maw. Suddenly he checked, hearing a slight movement ahead.

He froze, eyes boring into the darkness. He made out a shadowy form not far away on the ground, then another a short distance to the left. He had almost walked into the

[*Turn page*]

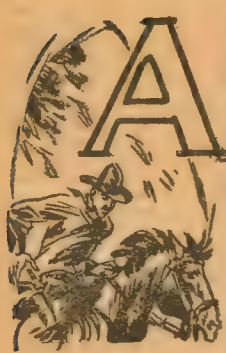
center of the camp. The Rio Kid started moving backward, eyes glued to the sleeping Apaches.

He sensed danger behind him, and a breath later a heavy body came plunging down on him. Instantly the Rio Kid arched and twisted to one side. A knife blade thudded into the ground at his side and a savage yell shredded the night. The Apache camp erupted into life. The Rio Kid grabbed for the Indian's knife wrist, caught it as the blade descended again.

He tried to throw the man off, or to reach his guns. In another moment the other Indians would be in the fight and it would end swiftly. A knife blade thrust would write a bloody finish to the Rio Kid!

CHAPTER VI

Guide and Aide



AS THE Rio Kid's antagonist tried to smother Bob Pryor's efforts, Apaches yelled and converged on the threshing, rolling shadows. The Rio Kid's left hand broke free and he reached for one of his Colts.

Another thundering sound came out of the night and shrill cowboy yells rang clear. Buck Nolan's men swept down the pass and onto the Apaches. Sixes blasted in a rolling fire. The Apaches stood their ground for a time, leaping toward the riders, intent on pulling them from saddle, or knocking them out by rifle or lance. Dust billowed up in the pass as the horses wheeled this way and that.

The Rio Kid slipped his six out of leather and clubbed its barrel down. The muzzle raked along the coppery cheek of his opponent, laying it open. The Indian's grip relaxed. The Rio Kid fended off another sweeping cut of the knife and his six slapped a heavy slug into the man's broad chest. The Apache shivered convulsively and fell to one side.

The Rio Kid worked himself out from under the lifeless body and came to his feet. The battle had ended, the Apaches scattering into the darkness, clambering up the rough walls of the pass. Buck Nolan swung out of saddle and stared around at the sprawled figures, ejecting the spent shells from his Colt.

"Dan's paid for, I reckon," he said soberly. "We'd better clean this up and see there ain't no more of 'em sneakin' around."

They buried the dead Apaches and scouted the valley from one end to the other. They found the Indian horse cavvy, a bunch of half-wild mustangs which broke their ropes at the approach of the whites, and thundered off down the pass.

Just at dawn the bone-weary men gathered at the Heaton ranchhouse.

"They didn't get to burn and rob it," Buck said, "and I reckon from now on them Apaches will leave this district strictly alone. They got too hot a welcome and lost too many men to tackle us again."

"An Apache never does as yuh think he will," the Rio Kid warned. "Better not let Rae come back here."

"Where'll she stay?" Buck asked.

"Globe, mebbe, till yuh get married. There's too much danger out here for a girl all alone."

They had breakfast from the food supplies that Rae had left in the kitchen. Buck left a man to watch the place and the rest headed back to the Square N, Buck's ranch. Now that the Rio Kid could judge Buck by broad daylight, the more certain he became that the young rancher was a man to ride the river with.

They came up out of the valley and the Rio Kid drew rein, his eyes circling the ridges in all directions. Buck waited, though his eagerness to return to Rae was not too well hidden.

"Copper up this way?" the Rio Kid asked.

Buck showed his surprise, then his eyes narrowed.

"Yuh one of them minin' gents?" he demanded.

The Rio Kid laughed. "No, but I heard there was a heap of ore hereabouts and got curious, that's all."

"Yes, there's copper," Buck said more evenly. "At least the gents who survey for the minin' companies say so. I reckon Dan Heaton and me has been pestered a dozen times this year to sell our spreads, or at least sell the mineral rights."

"Copper means *dinero*, generally," the Rio Kid said, as he urged Saber on with a light touch of the spurs.

Buck shrugged. "Mebbe. Dan and me fig-

gered mine dumps tailin's would plumb ruin our ranches. Lots of times them companies move whole towns in on yuh to house their workers. A man can't run beef on a spread all cluttered up with shafts, machinery and buildin's."

"Most ranchers are glad to sell," the Rio Kid suggested, "if the price is right."

"Oh, the price was pretty high up to about three months ago. But when the Apaches started breakin' out of San Carlos, seemed like copper lost a heap of value. There was four companies makin' us offers then. Now there's just one, and their price ain't much more'n the value of the land without any ore a-tall."

"What company?" the Rio Kid asked casually.

"Mid-Arizona Corporation, they call theirselves. Smooth talkin' gent name of Red Stuart was up through here just a month ago."

THE Rio Kid allowed no expression to show on his face. "Why did the other companies drop out?"

"Shucks, I don't know. Unless the Apache troubles scared 'em out complete. It takes a heap of dinero to start diggin' for copper and a heap more to bring in the machinery and equipment to handle the ore once yuh've found it. With the Apaches burnin' and killin', I wouldn't blame any of 'em for gettin' plumb careful."

"Neither would I," the Rio Kid agreed. "Did Stuart mention his backin'? Name anyone else?"

Buck thought a moment, then shook his head.

"No, but he hinted like this Mid-Arizona was mighty rich. Sort of made me wonder why they couldn't offer a better price with all that dinero they have to spend."

"Why is Mid-Arizona still in the game?" the Rio Kid asked thoughtfully. "They'd lose as much as any of the others by Apache raids."

"I asked this Stuart gent that same question," Buck answered. "He said Mid-Arizona had enough money that they could invest now and wait till the trouble blows over. Mebbe they have, but they're new."

The Rio Kid dropped the subject and the little band rode on to the Square N. Rae Heaton came to the porch as the men rode in the yard and the Rio Kid noticed the relief in her face when she saw that Buck had not been harmed.

The Rio Kid and Celestino, though anxious to be on their way to Globe, could not refuse Nolan's generous hospitality. When he sent his cook scurrying to fix coffee and food, the Rio Kid and Celestino were glad to relax in the comfortable chairs in the big main room. Buck and Rae talked in low tones in the kitchen.

Buck came into the front room, a new look of respect on his face.

"I didn't savvy yuh was the Rio Kid," he said. "Bob Pryor don't mean much to me. It's shore been a pleasure ridin' with yuh. I've heard plenty about what yuh've done."

"Thanks," the Rio Kid answered and flushed a little. "I just helped you and Rae while I could."

"From what Rae tells me, yuh did a heap to save her life." Buck looked down at his big hands, embarrassed. "I don't like to ask a gent questions, but what do yuh aim to do in Globe?"

"Wanderin' through, I reckon. Just look around, and then ride on."

Buck's face dropped and disappointment showed in his eyes.

"Shucks, I thought mebbe yuh'd come up here about this Apache trouble. The raid on Rae's place has got my dander up. Ain't nobody safe till every Apache's back on the San Carlos Reservation and stayin' there."

"That's right," the Rio Kid answered. "What's on yore mind?"

"I aim to help put the Injuns back on the reservation. I thought mebbe was yuh workin' on that, I could help."

The Rio Kid leaned back and shrewdly eyed Buck. He glanced over at Celestino, who gave him a flashing smile and nodded emphatically. A man like Buck could be of invaluable aid, knowing the country around Globe as he did.

"Buck," the Rio Kid said, "mebbe I am mixed up in this a little. Can yuh ride with me and take orders? Reckon yuh could keep yore mouth shut about where we go and what we do?"

Buck's head snapped up, eyes alight.

"Yuh got my word for that, Rio Kid. I figger this is my private fight, now that the Apaches killed Dan and tried to get Rae. Yuh can depend upon it."

"How about Rae?" the Rio Kid asked.

"I been talkin' to her just now," Buck said. "She can stay in the hotel at Globe or rent a house there till this thing blows over. It

would be better that way, anyhow. Never can tell when a war party will hit a ranch."

"I can tell yuh this, Buck. There's somethin' mighty nasty behind this Apache trouble. I aim to find it. Mebbe we'll run into some mighty tight spots and against some mighty powerful men. Yuh might have to match sixes with professional gunmen and killers, besides with lurkin' Apaches."

"Tryin' to scare me out?" Buck asked, with a grin. "It won't work, Rio Kid. Mebbe some day folks hereabouts won't have to worry none about renegades and Indians, but that's a long time off. Right now it takes gunsmoke to make the country safe. I aim to have my share of it."

"All right, Buck. I need a guide and a gent who knows everyone in Globe. Yuh're elected, and I'm blamed glad to have yuh."

Their hands met in a firm grip and the compact was sealed. . . .

EARLY the next day they took the trail to Globe. The Rio Kid and Celestino rode slightly ahead of Buck Nolan and Rae. By mid-morning, they came into the main street of the town. It was a crooked thoroughfare, following the course of Pinal Creek.

Its gaunt frame houses and false-front stores had been built to border a horse and mule track that had gradually developed into a street. At the north end a stark mountain dominated the town, frowning down into the canyon where puny humans had dared to challenge its supremacy.

"Somebody shore was mighty hopeful," Buck said to the Rio Kid, "when they named this Broad Street. Sort of figgered mebbe Globe would get as big as some of them Eastern cities, I reckon."

There was traffic on the street but not as heavy as the Rio Kid had expected. Men lined the sidewalks but there was none of the bustle and rush that the Rio Kid had seen in so many other mining towns. These men had little or nothing to do, and many of them looked to be miners.

"Yuh can tell most of the mines are shut down," the Rio Kid commented, and Buck nodded.

Celestino's dark eyes traveled over the men along the sidewalks and he edged closer to the Rio Kid.

"General, thees men do not have much peso. There are some who look *muy malo. Por Dios,* a one like thees Red Stuart would have him many gun hands."

"At the snap of a finger," the Rio Kid agreed, and his lips flattened. "I think mebbe we're headed for some hard work here in Globe."

Buck showed them the way to a small hotel. They registered and were led up the stairs to a long, bare hall. Rae's room was right across from Buck's, while the Rio Kid and Celestino were assigned to a cubicle next to the Square N owner.

The Rio Kid gave the wide, hard bed only a single glance. He was entirely familiar with the furnishings of such Western hotels. They didn't vary from Montana to the Mexican border.

He stood at the window and looked out over a flat roof, to an open meadow just beyond the town. Men were drilling there with a nondescript collection of rifles and shotguns of every size and make. They were pathetically ragged, though their leader bawled himself hoarse, trying to get them into some semblance of order. Buck came in and the Rio Kid pointed to the drilling men.

"Looks like Globe's scared to death."

"Mighty near," Buck answered. "That's the Home Guard. They figger to give the Apaches a hot time if they tackle the town."

"Why don't they leave that sort of trainin' to the Army? Them gents will be twice as hard to beat if they're left to fight in their own way."

"I don't know," Buck declared. "I guess when yuh get real scared, yuh sort of lose yore thinker."

"Rae is comfortable?" the Rio Kid asked, turning from the window.

"For the time, I reckon. She'll not stay long in the hotel if she can rent a house. A heap of workers has left Globe since the Apaches started rampagin'. Left their furniture, too. Rae believes the Injun trouble will last a long time, so she'll take over one of them houses."

The three men washed off the dust of the trail and left the hotel. As they wandered along Globe's street, they sensed the panic that gripped the town. A dozen times the Rio Kid heard snatches of talk about Indian marauders, rumors of new raids. The three men moved into a saloon and joined the line at the bar. There the Rio Kid nursed his drink and listened to the talk.

"The man that told me," a hulking miner was saying loudly, "shore knows what he's talkin' about. He's been down in the Dragoons and he says that Geronimo is gettin' a whole

GENERAL NELSON A. MILES

A STURDY New Englander, General Nelson A. Miles, brought to the Civil War all the courage and determination of the men of that rockbound coast, and his brilliant record as a fighting man was marked by many promotions. He was born in Westminster, Mass., August 8, 1839. At the age of seventeen young Miles went to Boston to work in a crockery store and attend night school.

At the beginning of the Civil War, he recruited a hundred volunteers for the Twenty-second Massachusetts Regiment, was commissioned captain, and assigned to the staff of General Howard. By 1862, he was a colonel, and later was the custodian of the captured Jefferson Davis at Fort Monroe.

When the "War Between the Brothers" was over, Miles did not return to New England, but went West, where he took command of the regular Fifth Infantry. In succeeding years he played a great role in defeating warring Indians, among them the Cheyennes, the Kiowas, and the Comanches. He took part in the wars with the Sioux, in Montana, and was on hand when Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and Spotted Eagle were defeated.

By 1880 he was a Brigadier General, and for eight years was in command of the Department of Arizona. But his Indian fighting days were far from over, for he was in the forefront of the men who captured Geronimo. Ten years later he became a Major General, and five years after that was Commanding General of the U. S. Army. He served both in the Spanish American War and in the Philippines before he died on May 15, 1925, of a heart attack.

Injun army together. They aim to slip up here and wipe out the sojers in a big raid."

"Yuh told the general?" someone asked.

The miner shrugged. "Shore, I told him. But yuh'd think General Miles was a king or somethin', the way he keeps yuh waitin'. He listened and then told me he reckoned the cavalry wouldn't be caught that easy."

"Geronimo's smart," another man put in. The miner's big fist smacked onto the bar.

"Shore he's smart, and Miles ought to know it! But he's like all them sojers. Yuh can't tell him nothin'. I tell yuh, Globe will have to do her own fightin', and I'm blamed glad I'm in the Home Guard!"

The Rio Kid heard snatches of other conversations, dealing with the subject, before motioning his two companions to follow him.

CHAPTER VII

Globe

CELESTINO and Buck followed the Rio Kid as he turned from the bar. He walked slowly away from the saloon, checked himself, and turned to Buck.

"Who'd know most about the mine owners and companies?" he asked.

"Breck Long, I reckon," Buck answered. "He's manager of Western Minin' and head of the association them copper companies formed."

"I think I'd better have a talk with Senor Long," the Rio Kid said. "You and Celestino sort of roam around and keep yore ears open."

He found the offices of Western Mining just across the street. Men loafed before the door, or leaned against the wall—miners, by the looks of them. The Rio Kid pushed passed them and entered the low doorway. The main office was large but there was not much activity. A clerk looked up hopefully and the Rio Kid asked to see Breck Long.

He was ushered through a counter gate and to the rear, where the clerk tapped respectfully on the heavy paneled door of a private office. He disappeared inside for a moment, then returned.

"Mr. Long will see you."

The clerk silently closed the door behind the Rio Kid. The room was small but well lighted by a huge window in the rear wall. A large desk stood to one side of the window and behind it sat Breck Long.

He was a thin man with slightly stooped shoulders. Keen brown eyes bored into the Rio Kid in a swift, appraising look. Long's high forehead was deeply creased by wrinkles, topped by sparse brown hair neatly plastered down to the skull. His face was long, but the jaw was firm and craggy, the lips a touch thin, held tightly together as though the man spoke only when necessary. His nose was slightly hooked, narrow at the bridge, flaring slightly at the nostrils. Sideburns had a bare touch of gray in them.

"Your business, sir?" he asked.

Despite the clipped curtness of his speech, there was nothing irritating in it. His voice was smooth and cultured. He folded long-fingered hands over a stack of papers and waited, head cocked slightly to one side.

"I reckon yuh'd better know who I am, and why I'm here. I'm Bob Pryor, but people know me best as the Rio Kid."

"I've heard of you, sir." Breck nodded briefly. Only a slight flicker in his eyes betrayed his surprise.

"I'm in Globe to see what's behind the Apache troubles, Mr. Long," the Rio Kid continued. "John Clum asked me to do some private investigatin' for him."

"Clum!" Breck's thin brows arched. He waved the Rio Kid to a chair and leaned back comfortably in his own. "I'll do all I can to help John, but after all, I'm only a mining man. Indian troubles are hardly my line."

"Yuh might be able to help a lot," the Rio Kid said. He hitched forward. "Yuh're head of the association, I understand, so yuh'd know every company and man in the district."

"I do, Mr. Pryor." His eyes narrowed. "Are you trying to tell me that copper is behind the Apache trouble?"

"There'd be a heap of profit if somebody could arm and hire the Injuns to drive off his competition," the Rio Kid said drily.

Long leaned back in surprise and whistled softly.

"You're sure of this, Pryor?"

"No proof." The Rio Kid shook his head. "But there's been some things come up that point that way. Yuh understand, I'm talking in confidence and I'm accusing nobody."

"Understood," Breck Long agreed. He grasped the lapels of his long, black coat and carefully weighed the Rio Kid with a direct and searching look. "You can say what you like here."

"I'm sayin' nothin' yet." The Rio Kid smiled crookedly. "I'm only askin' now. What do yuh know about the Mid-Arizona?"

"New company, but seems to have a lot of money behind it. No one knows exactly where it comes from. Hasn't done any working in the field, not so much as sunk a shaft. So far, Mid-Arizona has been content to buy up claims and ranches. They've even offered to buy out the Western Mining holdings but, of course, I refused. I only supervise the Globe district. The home office in London decides whether to buy or sell."

The Rio Kid looked surprised.

"Western's English-owned?"

"That's no secret." Long chuckled drily. "Western is a small part of a worldwide network of copper, gold, silver and iron mines. But that's not the point now. You suspect Mid-Arizona?"

"I don't know," the Rio Kid said honestly. "What do yuh know about Red Stuart?"

LONG leaned back and steepled his fingers thoughtfully.

"Very little. Mr. Stuart came here from Tucson and I don't know what mining experience he's had. He is more of a buyer than miner, I suspect. He is well-liked, I believe, by most people he meets. He'd loud and blustery. I personally don't like him but I've never heard anything against him. Have you?"

"Stuart tried to hire me from under Clum. He's hired a gunmaster, Doc Holliday, and that man's a killer."

"You're sure of this, Pryor?" Long demanded.

"About Doc, yes. I've known that man's record since the old Abilene days. Yuh can see how this can add up to trouble. I'd appreciate any information yuh might be able to pass along."

"I have none at the moment," Long said slowly. He sighed deeply and shook his head. "It's certainly strange what people will do for money. Frankly, Mr. Pryor, you have given me quite a shock about Red Stuart. I assumed he was honest enough—but this!"

"It's only a guess." The Rio Kid arose and walked to the door. "I will depend on yuh, Mr. Long, if anything new happens."

Long thumped the papers before him. "The mining companies can't take much more of this, Pryor. My own company was raided a short time ago just north of here. Everything destroyed and several men killed. Now you suggest that some unscrupulous competitor is trying to drive us out of the district. If this is not stopped, he might succeed, sir."

"I'll do what I can," the Rio Kid said.

Long calmed himself and smiled. As he circled the desk and extended his hand, the Rio Kid noticed that he was surprisingly tall and rangy.

"I know you will, Pryor," Long said. "If Clum backs you, that's good enough for me. Let me know what progress you make and I'll give you any information that comes my way. I'll particularly watch the Mid-Arizona and Mr. Red Stuart."

The Rio Kid left the office and, outside, once more shoved his way through the line of loafers at the door. He knew now that they must be Western Mining men, laid off because of the raids.

He walked away from the office, drifting slowly through the crowd, once more listening to the rumors and fears that gripped the town. He watched the Home Guard drill for nearly half an hour, and his soldier's heart was sick at the clumsy way in which these miners, cowboys and clerks tried to act like veteran fighters. He turned away and threaded Broad Street again.

Just ahead, he saw Celestino and Buck Nolan enter a saloon, and hurried after them. He joined his friends at the bar where Buck glumly ordered. Buck poured the drink down his throat and slapped his glass on the mahogany.

"Never seen such a town," he complained. "To hear 'em talk, yuh'd say every manjack was ready to run for his life if he so much as smelled an Apache!"

"*Si*, General," Celestino agreed. "That ees true. Senor Buck and I, we separate and leesten here and there. Always, it ees the same."

"No line on anybody?" the Rio Kid asked.

"None whatever," Buck replied as he shook his head. "Folks just hear a whisper and pass it on. Grows worse as it travels, too, and there ain't nobody knows who started it."

"How about the minin' companies?"

"Nothin' there, either. That is, no more'n what everyone knows. The minin' companies are blamed near as scared as everybody else. Laid off a heap of men and closed down most of their diggin's. Don't know whether they aim to hold on or to sell out if they get the chance."

"Well,"—the Rio Kid sighed—"I guess we've learned enough for one day. There's nothin' good to report to John Clum when he shows up."

Far into the night, the Rio Kid and Celestino discussed what little they had learned. The Rio Kid told of his interview with Breck Long.

Outside, the crowd in the street continued its restless way. A tinny piano banged from a saloon nearby. A hoarse voice shouted something in the dark canyon between the hotel and the next building. The Rio Kid gazed up at the dark ceiling as he lay on the bed, hands clasped beneath his head.

"It don't add up," he said, with a sigh. "I reckon tomorrer I'd better do some pow-wowin' with the minin' companies."

They were up early and, after breakfast in the hotel dining room, wandered out onto the street again. The mining company offices were not open yet so the Rio Kid strolled back to the hotel. Buck Nolan stood in the lobby and nodded good morning.

"Yuh're up too blamed early for my dinero," Buck said, and grinned good-naturedly. "Let's wet our whistles till Rae comes down."

THEY went outside and entered the saloon next door. Two men were at the bar and they turned as the Rio Kid and his friends entered. The Rio Kid's eyes widened a trifle, but he didn't check his stride. Doc Holliday smiled. "Well, yuh sort of left Tucson in a hurry, Rio Kid," he said.

"My business was finished," the Rio Kid said shortly, and stepped to the bar.

Holliday's smile grew wider but there was no warmth in it.

"Not quite," he said. "Yuh plumb forgot Red Stuart. He's mighty put out with yuh, Rio Kid. He thought yuh'd take that job he offered."

"You act anxious about it, too."

"Me? Yuh read the sign wrong, like yuh did in Tucson. Rio Kid, meet a friend of mine, named Cholla Reagan. He takes care of them that act mean toward the Mid-Arizona and I back whatever he does. Mebbe yuh'll be seein' one another again."

Reagan was a big man, with beefy shoulders, a barrel chest and a paunch. His nose had been smashed in some barroom fight and his glittering black eyes were set too close together. Thick lips pulled back from yellowed teeth as he smiled loosely at the Rio Kid.

"Doc's been talkin' about yuh," he said. "Howdy."

The Rio Kid acknowledged Reagan with a curt bob of his head, studying the fellow with swift appraisal. He noted that the man's arms seemed almost too long for his body, and that his soiled shirt barely met across his rounded stomach, about which were looped heavy gun-belts, the matched holsters thonged down to each thick thigh. Soiled levis were crammed into good boots which had suffered from lack of care.

The Rio Kid transferred his attention to Doc Holliday after that single, sweeping glance at Reagan. The cadaverous ex-dentist studied his whisky, holding the amber fluid to the light.

"A town can be mighty unhealthy unless yuh got the right kind of friends," Doc casually observed. "I've noticed that in Dodge, Abilene and Tombstone."

"How about Globe?" the Rio Kid asked evenly.

Doc's lips twisted into the caricature of a smile.

"Globe? Me, I got friends and I think I'll like it. But mebbe you won't, Rio Kid. Mebbe yuh won't."

"Meanin'?"

"Most anything." Doc Holliday placed his empty glass on the bar and turned. "Mebbe if yuh get wise and get the right sort of friends around Globe, yuh'll make yoreself a heap of dinero, besides keepin' yore hide untouched."

"Who can tell what will happen?" the Rio Kid answerd. "And who can know what friends are best? I reckon I'll watch the Mid-Arizona Corporation and see what sort of moves it makes."

"Do that"—Doc bowed slightly an his brows arched high—"as long as yuh can. Boot Hill ain't never far away from any town, is it?"

He walked away. Cholla grinned broadly, slowly stroked the matched holsters. His beady eyes cut from the Rio Kid to Buck, to Celestino, and back to the Rio Kid.

"Blamed illuminatin' talk," he commented, turned, and followed Doc Holliday out the door.

The Rio Kid checked Buck's quick gesture toward his six.

"Don't fight the picket rope, Buck. That's playin' the way they want it.

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CHAPTER VIII

Challenge

PINNING a coin down the bar to pay for the drinks the Rio Kid and his companions left the saloon. They walked down the street to the row of low buildings where the mining companies had their offices.

The Mid-Arizona was open but the Rio Kid saw no sign of Red Stuart, Doc Holliday or the big gunslammer, "Cholla" Reagan. A pasty-faced clerk with shifty eyes came to the counter.

"Is Red Stuart around?" the Rio Kid demanded.

"No, but we expect him today or tomorrow. Mr. Holliday is in town, though, and he'll be here most any minute."

"I've seen Holliday," the Rio Kid said drily.

The three men turned to leave but the clerk's query checked them.

"Shall I tell Mr. Stuart who called?"

"Yes, say the Rio Kid. Tell Mr. Stuart I don't like the company he keeps and the way he tries to persuade a man to work for him. I reckon Mr. Stuart will understand. *Adios.*"

Buck returned to the hotel while the Rio Kid and Celestino saddled up and rode north toward the Army camp. The Rio Kid knew General Miles personally from the old Civil War days and hoped the officer might have uncovered something that would give the Rio Kid a lead to his problem.

While he rode on this mission, two men met in a well-furnished room in Globe. One of them was Red Stuart, but his friendly smile was gone. He paced angrily back and forth while his boss calmly watched him. The older man's voice was even and unemotional.

"You've made a bad mistake, Stuart. You could have had the Rio Kid on our payroll if you'd handled the thing right."

"I did the best I could," Stuart snapped.

"It wasn't good enough," the boss answered quietly. "You seem to think every man can be either bribed or threatened. The Rio Kid can't be approached in either way."

"I'll still get him," Stuart said angrily. He stopped at the table and poured himself a drink.

"No." The boss quietly shook his head. "You've only aroused his suspicions against the Mid-Arizona and yourself. When you let him see Doc Holliday, you spoiled the play. Now the Rio Kid's in Globe, and he's watching you and the company. He was asking questions at the Mining Association offices."

"What could he have said?" Stuart demanded.

"Nothing definite, but the man's no fool. He's close to the truth, Stuart, though he's only guessing. He has an idea why the Apaches are being armed. He thinks you're the one who is doing it, or at least giving the orders."

"He can prove nothin'!" Stuart dismissed the subject.

The older man's voice became a little more chill.

"I am beginning to wonder if I made a mistake in choosing you, Stuart. You are underrating a man who is as keen and smart as they come. For instance, he suspects that you're not the real brains in Mid-Arizona. He thinks there's someone behind you."

Stuart's hands dropped to his side and he stared at the older man, dismayed. The boss let the silence pile up in the room until Stuart nervously shifted his weight and his eyes narrowed.

"I've warned you, Stuart," his superior said, "what will happen if you slip badly enough to expose my hand. I meant every word of it. I don't think you'll like Globe's Boot Hill."

Stuart swallowed and there was a touch of fear in his voice. "I reckon I'd better get rid of the Rio Kid, permanent."

"That seems to be called for. Do you have the man who can do it?"

"Shore," Stuart said with more confidence. "There's two or three of 'em, besides Doc Holliday. There won't be no trouble."

"Right away, Stuart," the boss said thoughtfully. "He's staying at the local hotel, and here's his room number. I'll feel much better about the situation if I hear that the Rio Kid is dead—not later than tomorrow morning, say."

I'll take care of it." Stuart accepted the paper with a scrawled number on it.

"See that you do. Make sure you're not seen when you leave the house. Good morning, Stuart, and best of luck in your enterprise. . . ."

The Rio Kid had a pleasant visit with General Miles but learned nothing new. There

had been no recent raids, though there was ample evidence that the Apaches on the San Carlos Reservation were restless. Miles tried to get the Rio Kid to act as civilian scout for his regiment, but Bob Pryor refused—regretfully.

HE AND Celestino rode back to Globe and checked at the telegraph office. There was no message from Clum, and the Rio Kid wondered if the undercover man at San Carlos would be the means of contact.

About noon another wild rumor hit Globe that Geronimo and the whole Apache tribe had been seen twenty miles south, moving northward to make contact with the San Carlos Indians. The Rio Kid watched the way in which Globe took the news.

There was a great deal of useless running around, and the Home Guard assembled in the meadow. They were split up into small parties which rode out to guard all the roads leading to Globe. Within two hours, three families had loaded their possessions on heavy wagons and moved out.

The Rio Kid and Celestino wandered around town and they could fairly see the fright and panic spread. Then the rumor proved false when a small scouting party of cavalry came in from the south. There had been no recent sign of Apaches from San Carlos, let alone Geronimo and his warriors.

"I'll bet yuh a peso against twenty gold nuggets that Doc Holliday is behind this mornin's excitement," the Rio Kid said emphatically.

"*Si, General,*" Celestino replied. "He keeps thees trouble boiling so maybe more people leave Globe."

"If Stuart and Holliday can scare out the ranchers and miners, land and ore values up here will drop. Mid-Arizona steps in and buys mighty cheap."

"'*Sta bueno!*" Celestino exclaimed. He frowned. "But, General, who ees it who geeves guns and whisky to the Apaches up at San Carlos?"

"Don't know," the Rio Kid sighed, "but I reckon I could figger it mighty close between some gents we know. Only one trouble with that right now—proof. Let's get to the hotel. Watchin' this bunch of loco scared hombres is plumb disgustin'."

It was only a short walk to the hotel. The Rio Kid inquired at the desk for mail, but there was none. They slowly mounted the steps to the upper hall and walked to their room. The door opened inward, concealing a part of the wall. When Celestino closed it, he found himself looking directly into the muzzle of a six-gun. A second Colt covered the Rio Kid.

"Howdy, gents," the unknown gunman said, and grinned at them. A knife scar lined one leathery cheek and the man's left eye drooped so that he seemed to be constantly winking.

"Line yoreselves up against the wall over there, face to it. I reckon we'll be a heap more comfortable once yuh've been relieved of yore hardware."

The Rio Kid strained forward. The gunhawk pulled the hammer back and held it balanced under the ball of his thumb. His eyes glittered, and the Rio Kid knew the man was avid to kill. Slowly the Rio Kid turned and faced the wall.

"Do as he says, amigo," he said to Celestino.

"Now yuh got sense," the renegade chuckled.

The Rio Kid felt his sixes pulled from the holsters. Celestino flinched as his own Colts were lifted and flung into a far corner.

"Yuh can turn around now," the man said. "I don't reckon yuh can hurt nobody."

The Rio Kid and Celestino wheeled, slowly lowering their arms. The young Mexican glanced at the Rio Kid, but his companion's face was stony blank. The gunhawk looked jeeringly from one to the other of his captives.

"Who are yuh?" the Rio Kid snapped.

"Names don't matter, but for the short time yuh'll see me, yuh can call me Monte."

"Short time?" the Rio Kid echoed questioningly.

Monte's lips peeled back from his teeth in a wide grin. "Shore. Globe is goin' to have two new graves in its Boot Hill."

The Rio Kid recognized that this man, Monte, was a killer with a wide streak of cruelty in him. He wanted to torture mentally before his sixes blasted the life from the two men before him. He would use derision and scorn, he would pretend to be ready to kill, then delay the act, gloating over the writhing of his victims.

BUT at last Monte would kill. The Rio Kid had no doubt of that, nor did Celestino. The young Mexican's eyes had narrowed to pinpoints and he would spring forward at the ghost of a chance.

"Who sent yuh?" the Rio Kid asked.

He caught Celestino's eye and shook his head slightly in warning. Monte was trigger edgy now and the least move might set him off. Boasters, however, sometimes grew careless, so the Rio Kid played for the moment when the odds were not quite so great against him.

"I reckon some gents yuh know figgered I'd be good company for yuh," he answered.

"Doc Holliday." The Rio Kid declared bluntly.

"A mighty good man," Monte said. He cocked his head in mock seriousness. "Yuh shore made a mistake when yuh turned his offer down. Never knew anybody who bucked Doc and came out on top."

"Not yet," the Rio Kid agreed.

One of the two straight chairs in the room stood a few feet to his left. He was keenly aware of it, though he seemed to be looking directly at Monte. The gunhawk leaned back against the wall, sixes still leveled.

"I can't figger which one of yuh I'll salivate first," he complained. "Yuh got a choice yuh'd like to make?"

"Yuh're handlin' the guns," the Rio Kid answered briefly.

"I think I'll notch me a Mexican first," Monte said, and leveled one of the sixes at Celestino.

The Rio Kid felt every muscle tense. It sounded like part of the gloating mental torture, but a man like Monte was entirely unpredictable. Celestino stood stiff and silent as Monte slowly dogged back the hammer.

"No," Monte said abruptly, "I think mebbe he'll come second."

He lowered the gun hammer and grinned evilly into Celestino's drawn face. The Rio Kid had edged himself a trifle closer to the chair.

"Mebbe I've changed my mind about Doc Holliday's job," he said,

Monte showed mock regret. "Now, I'm shore sorry to hear that, Rio Kid. Yuh had yore chance and passed it up. Ain't nothin' yuh can do now."

"How do yuh expect to get away with it?" the Rio Kid asked. "A six makes a heap of noise when it goes off."

"That's all been figgered out, Rio Kid. I'm smart enough to know how to take care of myself." Monte's eyelid seemed to drop even more. "Mebbe yuh'd like to know what'll happen once yuh're dead."

The Rio Kid was an inch or so closer to the chair. He kept his fist clenched, but he could feel the sweat in the palm of his hand. Watching Monte, judging him, keeping him talking was like watching a short fuse sputter toward a stick of dynamite.

DR. JOHN H. HOLLIDAY

IN THE West, where he went in search of health, and where he earned the somewhat disputable honor of being the West's most cold-blooded gunman, Dr. John Holliday was better known as "Doc." Utterly fearless, hot-headed, and with none too good a temper, he could still control his emotions when he had a gun in his hands and a victim in his sights. It was said that it was because Doc Holliday had no fear of death himself—he fully expected each month he lived to be his last—that he could deal it out without a tremor.

Born in Valdosta, Georgia, the son of a Confederate major, he became a dentist in the East, but was still young when he contracted a fatal illness. His physicians believed his health would improve in the West, and it did, since month after month went by, and he remained the same.

He even opened a dental office in Dallas, Texas, but soon had to close it for lack of patients. In disgust, he took up the six-gun and gambling. It was no less an authority than the famous lawman, Wyatt Earp, whom he once sided, who declared that Doc Holliday's speed could be matched only by "Buckskin Frank" Leslie.

Doc even gambled on his own life—and lost. For after giving 8-5 odds that he would die by the six-gun, he died in a Colorado sanitarium for tubercular patients.

"Yuh'll never escape," the Rio Kid said flatly. "The hotel's too blamed full of folks. The hall will be plumb crowded after the first shot."

Monte laughed. He backed away and circled toward the window.

"It's a short drop from here to a low roof, and there's a back door of a saloon right handy. I just step into the saloon and join the crowd that comes runnin' to the hotel to see what all the shootin's about."

"That easy?" the Rio Kid asked. "Yuh're shore yuh can get out that window, and the roof ain't too much of a drop?"

"Plenty shore," Monte said. But he instinctively looked out the window and down at the roof.

Instantly the Rio Kid's hand shot out and he grabbed the chair back. In a single heave he slammed the chair toward the gunhawk. Monte had glimpsed the motion and had fallen into a crouch, his guns leveling. But the chair smashed into him and his shots went wild.

CHAPTER IX

Proof Wanted

IN THE instant the Rio Kid moved, Celestino exploded into action. He made a long dive for the corner where his guns lay. The Rio Kid followed the chair and before Monte could sweep it aside, the Rio Kid was on top of him. The two men went down.

One of Monte's guns blasted again, the slug burying itself in the ceiling. The Rio Kid's boot toe caught his wrist and the weapon went whirling under the bed. The Rio Kid dropped on Monte, and his powerful fingers wrapped around the man's wrist, twisting the second gun away from himself as Monte pulled the trigger.

The renegade fought like a cornered rat, twisting and throwing himself to shake off the Rio Kid. The scar on his face showed livid and his lips snarled. Celestino scooped up a six, whirled, and saw he could not use the gun without hitting the Rio Kid. He stepped close to the fighting men, waiting for a chance to bring the barrel down across Monte's head.

The renegade half-broke the Rio Kid's hold on his wrist. Instantly his gun moved upward. The Rio Kid desperately grabbed for a better hold, bending Monte's wrist at a sharp angle. Monte fired and sent the slug ripping into his own chest.

He arched spasmodically, stunned surprise showing for an instant in his eyes before they glazed. He fell limp.

The Rio Kid pulled himself off the dead gunman as feet thundered down the hall and the door burst open. Buck Nolan rushed in, behind him a crowd of frightened and curious men.

"It's all right, Buck," the Rio Kid said. "We just killed a sidewinder."

"Yuh ain't hurt?"

"None whatever." The Rio Kid faced the others who peered curiously in the room. "Any of you know this hombre layin' here?"

"Monte Carlson," a man answered. "Hung around the saloons a heap till he took a job with that Mid-Arizona outfit."

"Then I reckon I'll just return him to Mid-Arizona," the Rio Kid said grimly. "Celestino, you and Buck get the room clear."

He bent over Monte and went through his pockets. He found nothing of any importance that would hook Monte Carlson directly to Doc Holliday and the Mid-Arizona, except a folded piece of paper in the man's vest pocket. It was soiled and bore the Rio Kid's room number written in pencil; nothing else.

Buck and Celestino cleared the room while the Rio Kid stared thoughtfully at the paper. The numbers had been distinctly formed, with a curlicue flourish to them. The Rio Kid would recognize them if he ever saw them again. Buck came to the Rio Kid's side.

"What yuh aim to do with the buzzard?" he asked.

"Give him back to the gent that sent him," the Rio Kid said. He carefully folded the paper and placed it in his shirt pocket, buttoning down the flap. "Give me a hand with him. You and Buck side me, Celestino. I reckon Doc Holliday might get proddy."

The Rio Kid straightened, with Monte Carlson's body hanging limply over his shoulders. He left the hotel by the rear stairs. Buck and Celestino walked on either side of him as the Rio Kid moved down the alley and turned into the narrow passageway between

the Mid-Arizona office building and the saddle shop.

The office door was open and it was only a step or two from the corner of the building. The Rio Kid pushed through the door. Buck and Celestino came close on his heels, hands resting on their belts near their holsters. Red Stuart, still dust-stained, Doc Holliday, and the pasty-faced clerk stood close in conference. They turned as the three men entered.

Doc Holliday made an instinctive gesture toward his holster, then realized that Buck and Celestino were willing for a showdown. The clerk turned pale and stood staring at Monte Carlson's limp form. Red Stuart frowned.

"What's the meanin' of this?" he demanded.

With a heave of his shoulders, the Rio Kid let Monte's body fall to the floor at Stuart's feet. He looked from Stuart to Holliday, face grim, lips pressed tightly.

"Know the gent?" he demanded.

Holliday gave the slack body a brief glance. "Monte Carlson. I've seen him before."

"I ain't doubtin' that, Doc," the Rio Kid said evenly. "He worked for yuh."

"Who killed him?" Stuart asked.

"Yuh might saw he shot hisself, Stuart. This gent tried a bushwhack in my room. He liked to talk too much."

Stuart's face blazed an angry red.

"Why bring him here? Why tell me what happened between you and this hombre?"

THE Rio Kid tapped a hard finger on Stuart's chest.

"Because he worked for you. Either you or Doc sent him to salivate me and Celestino. I got a bit of advice for yuh."

"It's not wanted," Stuart snapped.

Holliday shifted restlessly, and watched Buck and Celestino.

"Let just him and me fight this out," Doc pleaded with Stuart.

"Keep out of this, Doc," Stuart said. "We-'re havin' no trouble unless this gent starts it."

"You've already started it," the Rio Kid cut in. "But next time yuh send a man to get my scalp, send a better one than Monte Carlson."

"I'll take that invitation some day, Rio Kid," Doc Holliday said.

"Any time," the Rio Kid snapped. "Only show some nerve and come out in the open. Yeller sidewinders try bushwacking."

"I always come in the open—and shootin'." Holliday smiled. "I always come that way."

"Suits me," the Rio Kid said.

With a shrug he turned and left the office, followed by Buck and Celestino. . . .

There seemed to be little more that could be learned in Globe itself. The Rio Kid did not expect another attack like Monte Carlson's for a while at least. Stuart would know that the Rio Kid would not be caught by surprise again. There remained only the folded paper with the room numbers written on it, and its value would only come later, if the Rio Kid ever ran into such handwritten figures again.

The Rio Kid's thoughts turned to the San Carlos Reservation. The undercover man whom Clum had placed would handle anything that turned up on the reservation itself, but the Rio Kid wondered if he might not be able to find the trail of the renegades who were slipping guns and whisky to the Apaches. San Carlos was a large place, but the Rio Kid believed that the contraband came from Globe. This limited the area of search.

The morning after the Rio Kid had flung the challenge of Monte Carlson's dead body at Stuart, he, Celestino, and Buck Nolan saddled up and rode out of Globe. The Rio Kid led the way northward, heading first for the cavalry camp.

General Miles was glad to see the Rio Kid again, but the commander looked tired and discouraged. He sank behind his field desk after he had shaken hands and stared moodily out the tent flap.

"We don't get anywhere, Captain Pryor," he said, with a deep sigh. "I've got patrols scattered over half the Territory, but the Apaches slip through. A small band hit a mine day before yesterday, but this time the Indians got the worst of it. That's a change, at least."

"Ammunition still gettin' to 'em?" the Rio Kid asked.

Miles swore softly under his breath. "It is," he admitted, "and we've tried every trick in the book to trap those renegades. Breck Long was here yesterday and I had a most uncomfortable hour. Long claims the mining companies demand immediate action to stop these depredations. They've got money and influence and they threaten to use it in Washington unless I straighten things up here."

"Can't blame the companies," the Rio Kid said, "nor I can't blame you. There's nothin' yuh can get ahold of in this case but suspicions."

"Get me one shred of proof!" Miles fist hit the desk. "And I'll show you how fast the military can move!"

"I'll try to get it for yuh," Captain Bob Pryor promised. "I think me'n the boys will take a pasear toward San Carlos. If we have luck, we might find where the Apaches and the renegades meet to deliver the rifles."

"I wish you luck. I'll give you a pass should some of my patrols stop and question you up in that area."

Ten minutes later the Rio Kid headed northward out of the camp, in the general direction of San Carlos. Buck and Celestino rode on either side, Buck pointing out the general contours of the land up toward the reservation.

He answered the shrewd questions the Rio Kid put to him.

"If yuh wanted to ride from Globe to San Carlos without bein' seen," the Rio Kid asked, "how would yuh do it?"

"There's about four ways," Buck answered readily. "all of 'em in an area of forty or fifty miles."

"We'll start lookin' there," the Rio Kid decided.

They rode into the wooded, broken country toward San Carlos and the Rio Kid became more aware of the difficult task the Army faced.

It was like trying to watch a hundred rat-holes all at once.

BUCK LED the way to a series of ravines and narrow valleys that pointed northeast toward San Carlos. They followed these for several miles and came to a great open meadow, fringed on the far side by a thick wall of trees. Buck drew rein and pointed ahead.

"The reservation is about five miles up that way, beyond them trees. This meadow is the only open country yuh have to cross and yuh can see how easy it'd be to slip by the soldiers."

The Rio Kid nodded. He lightly touched Saber with his blunted spurs and rode out across the meadow, Celestino and Buck following him. Constantly he searched the ground for trail sign, but found none. He stopped and looked back the way they had come.

"Nothin' here, Buck," he said. "Lead the way to another trail."

Buck neck-reined his horse and headed almost directly west. Soon the country began to change, growing more rocky and eroded.

At last Buck drew rein at the lip of a rocky canyon.

"Not many know of this," he said. "Was I tryin' to keep hid, I'd use this canyon."

He found a way down the steep sides, a narrow path hardly wide enough for the horses.

When they reached the bottom, the Rio Kid's eyes gleamed and he pointed to the ground.

Tracks were plainly visible.

"Looks like yuh found one of the routes, Buck," he said quietly. "Let's foller this for a while."

They turned toward San Carlos, riding slowly, watching the rocky bends and walls. The tracks of shod and unshod horses were still clearly marked.

The walls pinched in and the canyon became gloomy with shadow.

They rounded a turn and came to a place where the canyon walls widened, curving around to another narrow passage beyond. The place was almost circular, with strangely eroded walls. The Rio Kid instantly spotted the dark area where fires had been built. He rode over to the cold ashes and drew rein, looking carefully around as he sat his saddle. He caught a gleam of light from a crevice between two big rocks and swung out of leather. Walking to the crevice, he bent down and picked up an empty whisky bottle.

He held it up and looked triumphantly at Buck and Celestino.

"They've held their powwows here. Apaches meet the renegades and get their ammunition and orders. A squadron of troopers—"

A rifle shot smacked flatly back from the walls in strange, harsh echoes. The bottle in the Rio Kid's hand was smashed into a thousand glittering fragments and the bullet whined spitefully off into space.

Instantly the Rio Kid wheeled, hands dropping down to his holsters, his body going into a crouch.

A second slug ripped close to his head and splattered against the rock. The Rio Kid glimpsed the puff of smoke high up on the canyon rim, clear across the pocket. It

JOHN P. CLUM

AN EASTERNER himself, John P. Clum made his name famous in the West as a man who understood Indians as did few others. For a time he served as Indian Agent under General Lew Wallace at Santa Fe. Later he tried out some revolutionary ideas for handling the delicate Indian problem—which turned out successfully. One of them, which was generally adopted in all Reservations, was the "Apache Court" which he put into effect after he was appointed to the Apache Reservation in 1874.

It was Clum's earnest belief that Indians had no chance in white men's courts, and that Indians should be allowed to have a hand in ruling themselves. Through the Apache Court, the Indians passed judgment on their own offenders against the law, and dealt out the sentences.

Besides that, Clum organized the famous Apache Scouts, who became a proud law body to carry out the orders of their own court. The system worked splendidly for Clum, with the exception of one defiant raider—the notorious Geronimo.

Clum served long and honorably as Indian Agent, finally resigning to become the editor of the famous Tombstone Epitaph. In that capacity he became the friend of many of the West's famous. John P. Clum lived a long and active life, and spent his last days peacefully in retirement.

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was beyond the range of their sixes. Celestino's guns were out in his hands and Buck wheeled his horse around.

"Telescope sight!" the Rio Kid exclaimed. "He'll pick us off like rabbits. Head out!"

He jumped for Saber's side and vaulted into saddle. Another bullet creased the rump of Celestino's horse. The animal squealed and plunged. Saber raced back to the safety of the narrow canyon walls, Buck and Celestino thundering close behind. A parting shot winged high over their heads and then the three rounded a turn in the canyon.

Instantly, the Rio Kid pulled Saber to a sliding halt.

"Take us out of the canyon, Buck!" he yelled. "If we can close with that jasper, his telescope won't be much good!"

CHAPTER X

Duppa Reports

YOUNG Buck Nolan nodded and led the way. A mile further on, he pointed toward another goat trail, leading up the canyon wall, and headed his mount into it. The three horses scrambled up the steep ascent and gained the canyon rim. The Rio Kid wheeled Saber and thundered back toward the hidden bushwacker.

The top of the canyon was covered with trees and bushes that led in an unbroken wave toward San Carlos. The canyon itself was a deep gash in the earth to the left. Just ahead, the rim fell back and the Rio Kid knew that the rifleman's position was not far ahead.

Without orders, Buck and Celestino veered off to either side, to form a wide net. The Rio Kid plunged ahead, hands close to his guns, eyes spearing into every clump of bushes as Saber flashed by. He had no glimpse of the bushwacker. At last he drew rein on the canyon rim, face grim and lips pressed tight. Celestino and Buck came riding up.

The Rio Kid pointed down to empty brass shells lying on the rim. He lifted his arm and pointed down into the canyon. The black circle of the old campfire and the rocks were in plain view a long rifle shot away.

"Our friend rattled his hocks out of here," the Rio Kid said, his voice edged with disappointment.

"*Por Dios,* we can trail heem, General!"

The Rio Kid shook his head.

"It won't do much good in this wilderness. He could hide his trail a dozen places in the next mile."

"Plumb senseless," Buck said thoughtfully, "that they should leave a guard up here. Ain't nothing to watch. Yuh can bet them Apaches carried away all the renegades brought 'em."

"I've thought of that," the Rio Kid said grimly. "That bushwackin' hombre wasn't no guard. My chips say this gent trailed us from Globe this mornin', just waitin' for a chance to line his sights on us. He was one of Monte Carlson's breed."

Buck whistled and Celestino's eyes darkened angrily. The Rio Kid looked around once more then turned to Saber's head.

"Might as well ride back," he said. "We'll report this trail and the other to Miles and the troopers can patrol it. Won't do much good, though. The renegades will meet the Apaches some other place."

Late that afternoon, they stopped again at the camp and the Rio Kid reported to General Miles. The officer had Buck show the trails into San Carlos on a large map.

"We'll watch them from now on," Miles said. His eyes blazed in futile anger. "If I watched every canyon, ravine and valley, my whole command would be broken up. It's an impossible job, Pryor."

"Looks like it. Mebbe somethin' will come up at Globe or at San Carlos that'll end the trouble."

"I don't believe it," Miles said and swore.

The lights had just come on at Globe when the three weary men rode in. They stabled their horses and clumped wearily to the hotel. The Rio Kid had no more than stepped inside the door than a man arose from one of the lobby chairs and approached him. Celestino hissed a warning and his hand dropped to his gun butt.

"Rio Kid?" the man asked. "I've been waiting most of the day to see you."

He was tall and supple, with broad shoulders and a narrow waist. He was dressed gaudily in a brilliant orange shirt with brown pipings, a purple neckerchief, and fawn-colored trousers. His gun-belt was highly tooled, as was the holster, and the six had an ornate pearl handle.

But there was something grim about the thin lips in his bony face. His skin was tanned so deeply it looked coppery and his high cheekbones gave him a harsh, savage look. In the black eyes, though, was a humorous gleam. His hair was black and coarse, escaping in lank strings from under the fawn-colored Stetson.

"About what?" the Rio Kid demanded.

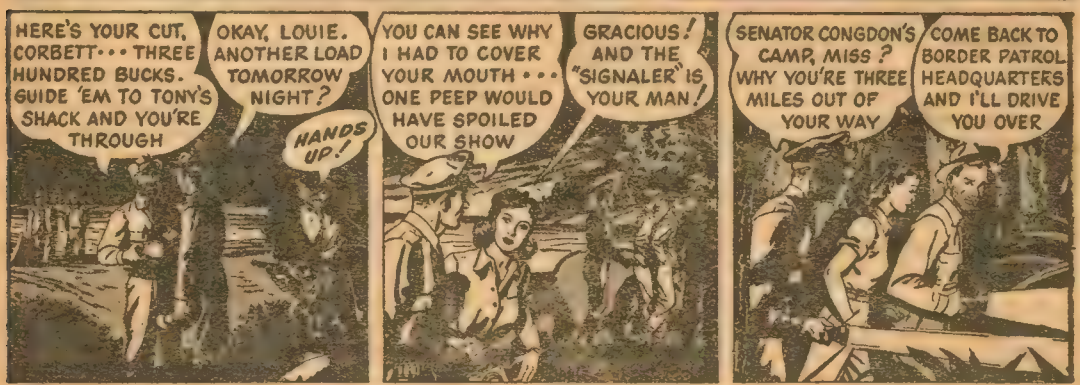
"A certain matter you discussed with a mutual friend in Tucson, old man. I think your room will have a certain amount of privacy lacking down here."

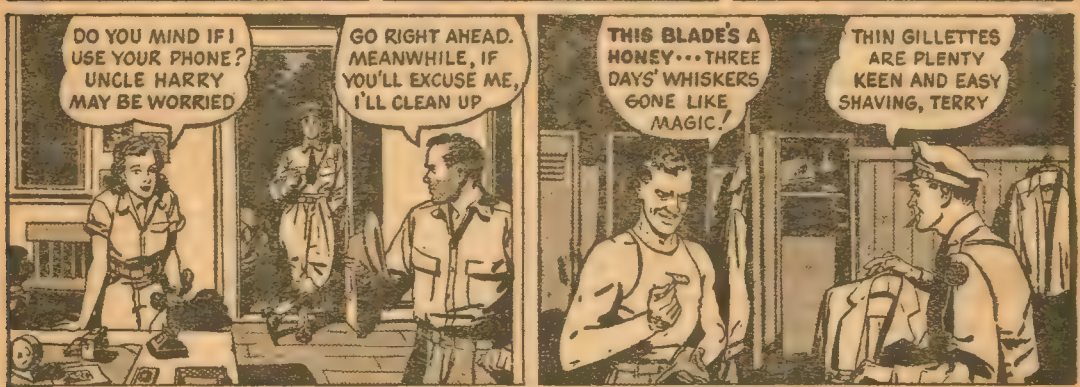
The Rio Kid turned and led the way up the stairs. They entered the room and Celestino caught the quick, suspicious look the stranger sent his way. The Rio Kid smiled slightly.

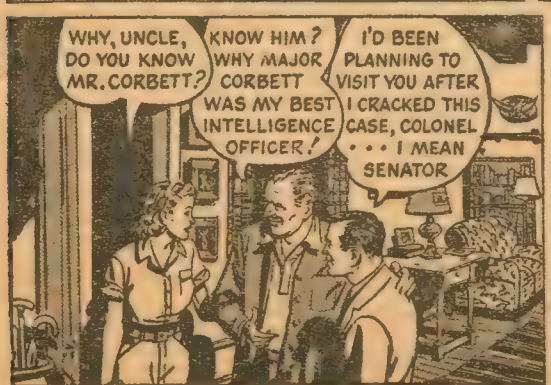
[*Turn to page 44*]

TERRY TRAPPED THE ALIEN SMUGGLERS AND THEN . . .

HURRYING TO REACH HER UNCLE'S CAMP ON LAKE HURON BEFORE DARK, BETTY ADAMS STUMBLES UPON MYSTERIOUS DOINGS IN WATKINS COVE


HERE'S YOUR CUT, CORBETT . . . THREE HUNDRED BUCKS. GUIDE 'EM TO TONY'S SHACK AND YOU'RE THROUGH
OKAY, LOUIE. ANOTHER LOAD TOMORROW NIGHT?
HANDS UP!
YOU CAN SEE WHY I HAD TO COVER YOUR MOUTH . . . ONE PEEP WOULD HAVE SPOILED OUR SHOW
GRACIOUS! AND THE "SIGNALER" IS YOUR MAN!
SENATOR CONGDON'S CAMP, MISS? WHY YOU'RE THREE MILES OUT OF YOUR WAY
COME BACK TO BORDER PATROL HEADQUARTERS AND I'LL DRIVE YOU OVER


DO YOU MIND IF I USE YOUR PHONE? UNCLE HARRY MAY BE WORRIED
GO RIGHT AHEAD. MEANWHILE, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I'LL CLEAN UP
THIS BLADE'S A HONEY . . . THREE DAYS' WHISKERS GONE LIKE MAGIC!
THIN GILLETTES ARE PLENTY KEEN AND EASY SHAVING, TERRY


WHY, UNCLE, DO YOU KNOW MR. CORBETT?
KNOW HIM? WHY MAJOR CORBETT WAS MY BEST INTELLIGENCE OFFICER!
I'D BEEN PLANNING TO VISIT YOU AFTER I CRACKED THIS CASE, COLONEL . . . I MEAN SENATOR

YOU GET SMOOTH, REFRESHING SHAVES IN JIG-TIME WITH THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE THE KEENEST, LONGEST-LASTING BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD, AND BECAUSE THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR ACCURATELY, YOUR FACE IS PROTECTED FROM THE SCRAPE AND IRRITATION OF MISFIT BLADES. USE THIN GILLETTES
THIN
Gillette
10

"I didn't get your name or I'd make yuh acquainted with Senor Mireles. We always work together."

"I'm Darrell Duppa."

"You!" The Rio Kid couldn't check his surprise.

The languid dandy arched his brows.

"What did you expect?"

"Well, I don't know."

THE Rio Kid's glance travelled over the gaudy raiment, and Duppa waved his hand in lazy dismissal.

"Oh, the clothes. I assure you they have nothing whatever to do with my value to John Clum. A few of the less intelligent gentry have confused my taste for color in clothing for my ability to take care of myself."

"I don't think I will," the Rio Kid said.

Duppa leaned back comfortably in his chair.

"I have seen John at San Carlos," he said. "He told me you were here, and asked me to report to you about what little I've discovered."

"When will John come to Globe?" asked the Rio Kid.

"As soon as he gets a few things arranged at San Carlos. I found one of the white employees up there not above making an occasional dishonest dollar. Undoubtedly, he was of great help to those who wished to stir up the Apaches, but they'll no longer have him to depend upon."

"Their man at San Carlos?" the Rio Kid asked.

Duppa sighed and shook his head.

"No, worse luck—just an underling who took orders, was paid, and asked no questions. D'ye know, Rio Kid, an Apache village is a very uncomfortable place in which to live? And then, as reward, you bag a mere unimportant fool. I'm really glad to come to Globe. I can dress, not only as a white man, but in the way I like."

The Rio Kid's eyes narrowed and he studied the dark face before him. He was astounded at the man's resemblance to an Apache.

"Yuh've lived as an Indian at San Carlos?" he asked.

"How else could I enter without suspicion? The agents have me down as a difficult Indian, and one to be watched. I hear many things that way." Duppa leaned forward and his voice grew decisive, clipped. "But we're not discussing ourselves, Rio Kid."

"I savvy." The Rio Kid rubbed his hand along his jaw. "I've made only a little progress in Globe. Tell John when yuh get back to San Carlos. I know the Mid-Arizona is in this thing, and deep in it. Red Stuart is buyin' where other companies are sellin'. Mid-Arizona finds the Apaches cussed good tools to do its job of forcin' out competitors."

"It's a dirty business!" Duppa exclaimed, his lip curling.

"There's someone behind Stuart and the Mid-Arizona. I don't know who it is, but I have to find the gent. Somethin' else—tell John a few of the rat-runs into San Carlos have been plugged up."

"That'll be a help," Duppa sighed. "I can't offer much information, old man. I've been present at some secret councils at San Carlos. I have an illegal rifle right now, handed to me by an Apache sub-chief."

"But the agents can't allow—"

"Duppa's smile cut the Rio Kid short.

"When you visit San Carlos, you'll find how easy it is to avoid official eyes. It's just as easy for a small band to slip out of the reservation, raid and plunder, and slip back in again without detection. I know. I've seen 'em come and go."

"Where did the sub-chief get the rifle?"

"I'd like to know that myself. I'd like to know who brings in the embalming fluid the Apaches consider the elixir of the gods. It comes in, that's all I know. So far, I've not found a white man implicated, though there's a whisper that goes around the ramadas."

"A lead?" the Rio Kid leaned forward.

"Perhaps. I don't know. There's someone called Eyes-Like-A-Rock by the Apaches. Sounds like an Indian, but they have a habit of tagging white men with names like that."

THE Rio Kid paced from the window to the bed, and back to the window again. He stood there, frowning down at Globe, hardly seeing the buildings. Duppa sighed and shifted around in his chair.

"Eyes-Like-A-Rock has to be discovered and unmasked if the trouble at San Carlos is to be stopped. Of course, I haven't the least idea who he is, though I hope to find out in time."

"If the Apaches don't unmask you first," the Rio Kid said grimly.

"There is always that chance, of course," Duppa answered. "Be deucedly uncomfortable, you know."

"I can imagine," the Rio Kid said drily. He

turned from the window. "Eyes-Like-A-Rock describes this hombre, like Indians always do. Right now, I can't figger anybody who fits it."

Duppa arose.

"Well, he must be found and taken out of the game," the Englishman said. "I shall return to San Carlos tomorrow. In the meantime, there are the pleasures of Globe to be tasted before I become an Apache again."

"Not much at Globe."

"Correct, old man, but the lowest saloon in Globe is a palace compared to a wickiup, I can assure you. If I discover something more, I'll see that you get word. Clum may bring it, or I may have to slip in as I have this time. Above all, try to discover who our mysterious friend is."

"Yuh can depend on me," the Rio Kid said.

The two shook hands and Darrell Duppa left. When Celestino had closed the door behind him, the Rio Kid sighed.

"There goes a man, amigo, for all his fancy togs. Every second he's with the Apaches, he's in danger. They wouldn't let him die easy if they ever caught him. John Clum shore made a wise choice in Duppa."

"*Si*, General, and in you also."

"That we got to prove," the Rio Kid answered, with a wry smile. "We start lookin' for Eyes-Like-A-Rock pronto."

CHAPTER XI

Gun in the Dark

FOR the first days in Globe it was hard for Rae Heaton. At first, she could not quite realize that her father was dead. The quick change from the ranch to the town added to the sense of unreality, but gradually the enormity of her loss added its load of sorrow to her troubles.

She managed to keep her grief fairly well-hidden, and tried to plan her life for the years to come. She and Buck would be married, but the young rancher felt that the Apaches should be driven back to the San Carlos Reservation and the country made peaceful before they could ever hope to establish their home in security.

At the moment, Rae felt that the Apache would always scourge the land. The Army was constantly out chasing raiding bands that seemed to evaporate into thin air then appeared to kill and burn at another spot miles away. She could not help feeling the panic that swept regularly through Globe, and stories constantly streamed in of ranches abandoned, mines closed down, people leaving the accursed area.

Rae was not shaken by the panic itself. There was too much of her father's stubbornness in her for her simply to give up the plans she had made. But she felt that she would remain in Globe for a long, long time and she hated the bare, crudely furnished hotel room.

Escorted by Buck Nolan, she spent some time looking over the abandoned homes in Globe, and finally chose one only a block from the hotel. The rent was cheap and most of the furniture had been left by the former panic stricken tenants.

Rae had only to move in and fit herself to the new routine. Buck, Celestino and the Rio Kid were always visitors for the delicious meals that Rae prepared, far better than the flat cooking at the hotel.

About three nights after Duppa had made his report and had disappeared as quickly as he had come, the three companions sat around Rae's table. The meal was finished and they pulled deeply on their cigarettes. The Rio Kid's high forehead was creased deeply in worried thought. Buck and Celestino silently watched him a while, then the young rancher ground out his cigarette.

"Yuh act plumb discouraged," he suggested.

The Rio Kid gave a slight start and smiled.

"Reckon I am, Buck. We've shore turned this town upside down tryin' to find how rifles and whisky get to San Carlos. Me'n Celestino have watched every blamed store and warehouse, and we can't get a line on it."

"Yuh're shore it comes from here?" Buck asked.

"Blamed shore. Mid-Arizona is behind it and they'll keep the equipment handy to ship. Globe's as good as any other place and Stuart has his headquarters here."

"Yuh'd think it would be easy," Buck sighed.

Celestino's features twisted in mock agony. "Senor, I assure you I have walked twenty miles today. *Si*, that ees right."

"We're going in circles, looks like," the Rio Kid said. He shoved back from the table,

smiled at Rae. "Celestino and me will get back to the hotel. Buck, you come when yuh're ready."

The Rio Kid and Celestino left the house and walked slowly along the dark street toward the hotel. At Broad, the Rio Kid hesitated, then turned toward the offices of the Mid-Arizona Corporation. They were dark and there was no sign of life about the building.

Vaguely disappointed, the Rio Kid started to visit the saloons along the street. Celestino kept just a pace behind him, dark eyes alert. On a case like this, there was always the chance of sudden bushwhack. The memory of Monte Carlson was too fresh for the young Mexican to leave his "General" unguarded.

At the fourth saloon, the Rio Kid saw Red Stuart and Doc Holliday leaning against the bar. Stuart turned and faced the doors, just as the Rio Kid entered. The man's red face broke in a broad smile and he waited until the Rio Kid stopped just before him.

"Yuh been busy as a tumbleweed in a twister," he said mockingly. "I get plumb tired watchin' yuh."

"Any need for yuh to watch?" the Rio Kid asked abruptly.

Stuart's smile vanished for a moment, then returned in full force.

"No, but it's a laugh to watch a stubborn man make a fool of hisself. Why don't yuh admit yuh're whipped, Pryor? Yuh got the idea that I'm causin' all the trouble around here. Yuh're wrong. Yuh'll never get the proof."

"Mebbe not," the Rio Kid answered. "But I ain't through prospectin'."

Doc Holliday coolly measured the Rio Kid.

"Some day I'm goin' to get plumb riled when yuh nose around," he remarked.

"That's yore privilege," the Rio Kid snapped.

HE CHECKED as he heard a distant gunshot, quickly followed by a second. The crowded room became quiet for a moment, each man straining to listen. The shots were not repeated and the crowd knew Apaches had not appeared. Noise instantly boiled up again. Red Stuart and Doc Holliday beamed for some reason. They held up their glasses to the Rio Kid.

"Here's to yuh, Pryor," Stuart said, and laughed. "May yore troubles get bigger."

The Rio Kid turned and walked out of the saloon, Celestino guarding his back against a possible quick attack from Doc Holliday. The gaunt dentist watched the Rio Kid leave, making no move toward his six. Out on the street, the Rio Kid saw no further sign of excitement, nor had he any explanation for the shots he had heard.

He crossed the street to the hotel. The two had no more than reached their room and dropped their hats on the bed when they heard pounding steps in the hall outside. Someone thundered on the door panels and Celestino's hand dropped to his holster. He jerked open the door to face a breathless, excited man.

"You the Rio Kid?" the man jerked out.

"I am."

The Rio Kid stepped forward. The stranger's wide eyes jumped to him and he gulped deeply, to control his breath.

"Yuh're wanted at Miss Heaton's place! There's been trouble."

"She hurt?" the Rio Kid exclaimed.

"Not her. There was a gun fight and a gent named Nolan was downed."

"Buck!" The Rio Kid wheeled and grabbed his hat.

The three men hurried downstairs and into the street. They ran the short distance to Rae's house where light streamed from the windows and the open door. A small knot of curious watchers still waited out by the walk. The Rio Kid's harsh glance swept over them but he recognized no one.

Rae Heaton came from the bedroom as the Rio Kid knocked on the door post and stepped inside. Her face was pale and drawn, her eyes wide. She came swiftly toward him.

"Buck's shot! Pretty serious. The doctor's with him now."

"How did it happen?" the Rio Kid demanded.

"I don't know. Buck had said good night and I had just closed the door. I thought I heard voices out in the street but I didn't pay much attention until I heard the shots. I jerked open the door and saw a man running away, another laying right before my walk." She took a deep breath. "It was Buck."

"Bushwhacked!" the Rio Kid snapped, and Rae did not answer. "Is Buck conscious?"

"Not yet."

At that moment the doctor came out, rolling down his sleeves. Rae came to her feet, the Rio Kid more slowly. The doctor came into the room, frowning thoughtfully.

"The slug came mighty close to his heart,"

he said. "He's asleep now, and I don't want him disturbed. Young lady, you'll have to act as his nurse. Maybe one of these gentlemen can alternate watch with you."

"Glad to, Doc." the Rio Kid said as he nodded. "Will Buck be all right?"

"For the moment no one can tell. But I feel that with constant care and attention, he'll pull through. When he regains consciousness, I want him kept quiet. If you have to question him, make it brief and, above all, no excitement."

He gave Rae further detailed instructions about Buck and left. The Rio Kid followed her into the bedroom. The lamp was turned low and Buck's strong face looked wan and sweat-beaded, the eyes closed, the lips partially opened. Rae stifled her sobs and sat down in the chair beside the bed. The Rio Kid moved silently away and into the front room.

"General, this maybe she's another treek Senor Stuart pull?" Celestino asked.

"Right now it looks like it," the Rio Kid answered grimly, "but we have to wait until Buck can tell us about it. We'll make camp right here in this room for the night, *amigo*."

The long hours dragged by. The Rio Kid relieved Rae and made her go to bed in her own room. He sat beside Buck, long legs spread out before him, frowning down at the dim pool of light made by the low-turned lamp. Once Buck stirred, and the Rio Kid thought he would regain consciousness, but the wounded man lapsed back into immobility.

Celestino relieved the Rio Kid so that Rae would be undisturbed until daylight. The Rio Kid made himself as comfortable as possible on the horsehair divan and tried to sleep. But he kept calling up the picture of Red Stuart and Doc Holliday. He saw again the sudden light in their eyes when they heard the shots, and he heard the mock toasts they gave him. He moved angrily around, trying to get more comfortable.

"They knew what was happenin'!" he told himself. "And they know I won't be able to prove anything. I aim to surprise 'em before I'm through."

THE Rio Kid awakened at mid-morning when Rae lightly shook his shoulder. She looked rested, though worry still lurked in her eyes. The Rio Kid instantly sat up and swung his feet to the floor, groping for his boots.

"Buck's awake," Rae said. "He wants to talk to you. Don't let him get tired."

"Yuh can depend on it, Miss Rae," he said gently. "Remember, I want to see you two married. I'll be careful."

He moved into the bedroom. Buck lay with his face turned to the door, his eyes feverish. He gave the Rio Kid a wan smile and the Rio Kid checked him before he spoke.

"If yuh talk long, yuh'll hurt yoreself, Buck. Just answer my questions with only a word or two at the most."

Rae moved to the foot of the bed and gave the Rio Kid a grateful look. Buck nodded slightly and there was a look of relief in his eyes.

"Was it a bushwhack?" the Rio Kid asked, and added as Buck frowned and looked puzzled, "I mean was the gent waitin' out in front for yuh?"

Buck nodded and the Rio Kid's voice grew sharp.

"But yuh spotted him before he was set and he had to face a showdown?"

"Right." Buck whispered the single word.

"Who?" the Rio Kid leaned forward.

"Cholla Reagan," Buck whispered faintly. "Gun—already—in his hand. No chance."

The Rio Kid quickly checked Buck's speech as he saw the feverish excitement mount in the man's eyes. He sat beside the bed, frowning and tugging at his lower lip. Buck at last relaxed and the Rio Kid spoke slowly and thoughtfully.

"I think I get the picture, Buck. Cholla waited outside for yuh, probably was there when me'n Celestino came out. He waited in the shadows till yuh started for the hotel. Yuh caught a sound, or movement, and was quick enough to see the play. Yuh made a fast draw but Cholla had the edge, his gun already in his hand. He blasted yuh down and then ran."

"Saw his face—light from the window," Buck said, and was silent again.

The Rio Kid arose and looked down at the pale face.

"That's what I need to know," he said gently. "I reckon I can take care of Cholla Reagan. Don't worry none—just figger on gettin' well and gettin' hitched to Miss Rae here. That'd make any hombre feel better."

Buck smiled and Rae flushed rosily. The Rio Kid turned and walked out of the room. He found Celestino in the kitchen and joined him in a cup of coffee. The young

Mexican noticed the Rio Kid's grim face.

"Senor Buck, he has spoken. We have us maybe some gunsmoke thees morning, no?"

"I'm figgerin' that way. Yuh'll come along, amigo, but keep yore sixes out of the fracas unless some one else tries to take chips. I want Cholla Reagan all to myself."

Celestino's eyes widened.

"Senor Cholla, eh? *Por dios,* then we have thees Doc and Stuart at last, maybe."

"Not yet," the Rio Kid answered. "We find us Cholla first. Yuh about finished?"

Celestino hastily arose and, standing, gulped down the last of the coffee. He buckled on his gun-belt and snugged the holster to a better position on his hip. The Rio Kid looked in the bedroom. Buck was asleep again and the Rio Kid signaled Rae he was leaving for a short time. She came to the door.

"Be careful," she said. "I won't try to stop you, but don't take chances. If they'd gun down Buck, they'll be even more eager to catch you in a trap."

"Thanks, Miss Rae," the Rio Kid said gravely. "I'll be back."

CHAPTER XII

Alarm

WHEN both of them reached Broad Street in only a short time, it was filled with the usual crowd of restless, unemployed miners and frightened ranchers and cowboys from the surrounding countryside.

The Rio Kid felt certain that Cholla would stay clear of the Mid-Arizona for a while, so he gave the office only a sweeping glance as he passed it. Cholla might think that he had not been recognized and that Buck was dead. The dark night and the quick flight after the shooting gave him good reason to think so. So he might boldly visit the saloons, and the Rio Kid intended to look there first.

Cholla was not in the first, nor was there any news of him. The Rio Kid and Celestino spent little time getting to the second, and drew another blank. They went on to the third. The bartender there had a little more to tell them.

"Yep, Reagan was in here a while last night. He downed two or three quick ones like he was excited about somethin' and went out. Last I saw him."

"Don't know which way he went?" the Rio Kid asked sharply.

"Mister, I'm busy enough handlin' 'em when they come in to drink. I ain't got time to walk 'em home. Reagan didn't say where he was goin', I didn't ask, and I don't know."

That ended further talk. The Rio Kid and Celestino called at every saloon and found no further trace of the renegade gunslammer. At last the Rio Kid turned back toward the hotel, baffled. He had expected Cholla to stay close to Globe, but the man might have left. On impulse, the Rio Kid started visiting the few livery stables the town boasted. At the first stop he drew information.

"Reagan keeps his hoss here when he's in town," a roustabout answered the Rio Kid's question. "He come in early this mornin', saddled and rode out. Didn't notice which way he went and Cholla wasn't talkin'. All I know is he rode out of Globe."

The Rio Kid turned back toward the center of town, going more slowly. Celestino walked silently beside him for a while, but at last could check his curiosity no longer.

"Now what we do?" he asked.

"Tackle Mid-Arizona direct," the Rio Kid answered shortly. "I want 'em to savvy I know who done this shootin'."

Celestino loosened the six in his holster and dropped back a pace or so behind the Rio Kid. In this way he covered his General's back from any sudden surprise attack. They came to the Mid-Arizona office and the Rio Kid turned in.

He disregarded the clerk and pushed through the swing gate. The clerk started to protest, but Celestino's shoulder caught him in a sharp blow that slammed him against a desk. He took a single look at the dark, scowling eyes, gulped, and subsided. The Rio Kid pushed open the door to Stuart's private office, his hand hovering close to his gun butt.

Stuart looked up from his desk and Doc Holliday wheeled around, hand slashing downward. Celestino's voice cracked from the doorway and Doc saw the heavy Colt lined on his own middle. He jerked his hand away and stood tense, hard eyes boring into the Rio Kid. Stuart recovered his voice.

"Who let yuh in?"

"I come on my own steam," the Rio Kid

snapped. "Where's Cholla Reagan?"

"What yuh want with him?" Stuart demanded.

"He tried to bushwhack Buck Nolan last night. He didn't succeed, but that's not Cholla's fault. I aim to even the score with that sidewindin' bushwhacker."

Stuart glanced sharply at Doc and the Rio Kid's hard glare swung toward the ex-dentist. His attention was riveted on Doc's eyes. Hard now as blue stones. The man could easily fit the Apache description of Eyes-Like-A-Rock. The Rio Kid blinked, then wiped all emotion off his face.

"Yuh tryin' to hook this shootin' onto me and Doc?" Stuart demanded.

"Cholla's yore man." the Rio Kid snapped.

Stuart laughed. "We ain't responsible for what any employee does after workin' hours, Rio Kid. Yuh was with us at the saloon when the shootin' happened. Yuh know that."

"I know it. I've come to find out where Cholla's gone."

"Out of Globe," Doc Holliday said abruptly, and took a step forward. "I'd be glad to take his place at the workin' end of a six-gun."

THE Rio Kid had an impulse to call him then and there. It looked to be in the cards that he and Doc would tangle, and time would be saved if it happened now. Then the Rio Kid thought of the Apache description of the man who furnished them guns and whisky. Doc Holliday must live if that was to be pinned on him. The Rio Kid regretfully shook his head.

"No, I want Cholla hisself. I aim to make him talk. When he does, yore necks will be in a hangnoose."

"Yuh won't get him," Stuart snarled.

The four men stiffened when they heard a sudden burst of sound from the street. A horse plummeted madly down the thoroughfare, the rider yelling something as he streaked toward the cavalry post on the other side of town. The word was picked up by the crowd and the sound swelled into the little office.

"Apaches!"

"They're comin' to Globe!"

"Injun raid!"

The Rio Kid glanced sharply at Doc and Stuart. They looked as surprised as he did. He edged to the door and the two men centered their wary attention on him again.

"We'll finish our argument when this blows over," the Rio Kid said shortly. "Take care of yoreselves. I'd hate for an Apache to do a job I've marked out for myself."

He reached the door, wheeled, and ran the length of the outer office to the street. Celestino followed, watching the back trail, ready to meet any lead that Doc Holliday might throw their way.

The street was a mass of milling men. Many of them raced toward the drill ground to assemble for the defense of the town. Others ran toward their homes, intent on arming themselves and escaping before the marauding Apaches swept down on the little town. Others milled helplessly, rushing up the street for a block or two, then rushing back.

The Rio Kid and Celestino headed directly for the livery stable after a brief stop at their hotel room for their rifles. The stable was deserted, every man drawn to the center of town by the excitement. The Rio Kid saddled Saber while Celestino worked with the gray. With no loss of time, they were in leather and threading their way

[*Turn page*]

Can't Keep Grandma In Her Chair

She's as Lively as a Youngster—Now her Backache is better

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)

through the snarled traffic toward the north. At last they broke through to the edge of town and the Rio Kid let Saber set his own fast pace in a burst of speed toward the Army camp.

The post buzzed with activity, but it was controlled and coordinated. Squadrons of mounted men efficiently and smoothly formed, awaiting further orders. The Rio Kid rode directly to General Miles' tent and dismounted just as the general emerged. The officer saw him instantly and his face lighted.

"Any way I can help, General? Just give yore orders."

"You're joining us!" Miles exclaimed.

"Just to help, General, and I'm not goin' on the payroll."

Once more the general hid his disappointment. A detachment of the Globe Home Guard rode by and General Miles watched the ragged performance. His lips curled slightly as he turned to the Rio Kid.

"Where do you think the Apaches will attack?" he asked.

"I don't think they will," the Rio Kid answered flatly. "Did yuh ever hear of Injuns attackin' a town as big as this one? If they really did plan to raid, them Apaches can stay hid better'n any rattler."

"I'm inclined to agree with you," Miles said, "but I can't take any chances."

"Might be"—the Rio Kid frowned—"that they plan some devilment elsewhere. If they could scare us into stickin' close to Globe, then they could move where they pleased and not worry about interference."

Miles pulled on his fringed gauntlets.

"I'll move north of Globe a short distance, Captain Pryor," he said. "You might scout toward San Carlos and see if you can pick up any sign. Once you know in what direction the Apaches are moving contact me."

The Rio Kid nodded and saluted. He turned and hurried back to Saber, who was impatient to be off. He neck-reined the dun and rode at a swift trot out of camp, Celestino at his side.

The passing of the ragged Home Guard had left a pall of dust on the road that they followed for a mile or more before they caught up with the men themselves. A bull-voiced man in a stained and dirty red shirt challenged the Rio Kid, and came swaggering up to Saber.

"Where yuh think yuh're goin'?" he demanded.

"Scoutin' for General Miles," the Rio Kid answered shortly.

"Yuh don't look like no sojer. Reckon yuh'd better stay right here."

"Sorry," the Rio Kid said flatly. "My friend and me are ridin' on."

"When Jim Bullen gives an order—" the man began, but stopped short, eyeing the gun that lined right between his eyes. The Rio Kid had drawn so swiftly his hand had blurred.

"We're ridin' on," the Rio Kid repeated. "Where are the Apaches supposed to be?"

BULLEN swallowed, and the bluster left him.

"Headin' down from the north and east," he answered meekly.

"We'll go find 'em," the Rio Kid said, and his grim lips softened in a smile. "Sorry, Senor Bullen, but this is Army business and I got no time to argue. Adios."

He touched spurs to Saber and the dun raced down the road, Celestino's gray streaking after him. Bullen stood stock-still in the trail, dust billowing up around him. His pinched eyes looked thoughtful. His hand suddenly streaked to his holster and he drew his six. He stared at the gun and shook his head.

"Yuh're fast, Jim Bullen, but that gent is plumb miraculous. Mebbe yuh ain't the howlin' wolf yuh figgered yoreself to be."

He turned back toward his men. In the meantime, the Rio Kid had disappeared up the road. After a time he checked Saber's speed and Celestino drew up. The young Mexican jerked his thumb back in the direction of the Home Guard and laughed. The Rio Kid smiled, but it vanished when he looked up toward the broken country. The Apaches might be anywhere.

"They won't use a road or trail," he said thoughtfully. "They'll cut across country. Let's head up toward them draws to the right. Keep yore sixes and rifle ready, amigo. Yuh never can tell when yuh'll need 'em on a hunt like this."

They left the road and for a while the going was easy across a rolling, parklike meadow. Then they plunged into scrub oak and pines and the ground became broken as the foothills loomed closer. The two riders seemed to be the only living creatures in the universe. Just the soft thud of hoofs on the springy loam, the occasional creak of saddle leather broke the deep silence.

Within a few miles they came out of the forest and looked down a slope that was fairly clear. Celestino pointed northward toward the crest of a low ridge.

"The Apaches, she's been here before," he said quietly.

The Rio Kid lifted his gaze. Gaunt, blackened timbers marked where buildings had once stood. Multi-colored, streaked tailings showed that this had only recently been a working copper mine. The Rio Kid's lips pressed together angrily, and with a soft word to Saber he headed toward the ruins.

CHAPTER XIII

Prisoners

DRAWING rein in the midst of the destruction, the Rio Kid studied a fire-gutted bunkhouse which pointed a single, black corner post toward the clear blue sky. To one side, the heavy door of the storehouse hung askew on a single hinge. The reduction plant was a tangle of warped metal set in a heap of black ashes that the breeze would occasionally pick up in a little cloud and drop again.

"No wonder the copper companies are gettin' worried," the Rio Kid said. "How much loss yuh think is here, amigo?"

Celestino looked carefully around, and at last shrugged his expressive shoulders.

"*Madre de dios,* she is many pesos. Thees machines are cost maybe more for one than Celestino has seen in his life, eh?"

"Could be," the Rio Kid replied. "Machinery gone, buildings burned, and I bet there ain't a single can of food left in that storeroom. Workers killed or scattered. It'll take a heap of copper to pay back what the company lost here. How yuh figger Mid-Arizona plans to take chances like this?"

"*Quien sabe?*" Celestino asked.

"Best ride on," the Rio Kid said at last. "We ain't doin' nobody any good here."

They left the gutted mine behind them and pressed on toward the northeast. Once again the scrub trees closed about them. They headed into a twisting arroyo and followed it for several miles. It opened into a valley surrounded by high hills. Off to their left lay the remains of a fire-gutted ranchhouse.

As they started into a pass between the hills, the Rio Kid abruptly drew rein. He stared down at a bare space of ground.

"Riders!" he exclaimed softly. "Been here just before us."

"Not Indian, General," Celestino said, and pointed to a clear impression of an iron shoe.

The Rio Kid traced the trail as far as he could see, then lifted his head to the slope toward which the unknown men had ridden.

"About ten men," he said. "If they run into an Apache war party, they're goners. We'd better find 'em, amigo."

They turned to follow the trail and once more the Rio Kid let Saber stretch his legs. The dun flashed up the slope, running for the sheer joy of it. Celestino's gray stretched itself to the utmost and managed to keep fairly close to Saber. The riders topped the rise and dipped down the other side, crossed a narrow valley and plunged into a high canyon.

The Rio Kid slowed Saber to a walk to allow the animal to blow. In a short while he increased the speed to a fast trot that the dun could keep up indefinitely. The trail of the party ahead was still clear and much fresher. The country grew wilder and the canyon opened up into a little pocket, the edges choked with brush.

Instantly the Rio Kid felt the strange shiver chase up the black stripe along Saber's back. He drew rein, tense, hand dropping down to his holster. He never ignored that signal of unseen danger. His eyes darted ahead, to either side, searching the bushes, but he saw nothing. He twisted in the saddle and looked along the back trail.

Celestino waited, watching, face tight. There was no sound or any suspicious movement.

"Somethin's wrong," the Rio Kid said. "Saber's tellin' me about it."

"Saber ees seldom make the mistake," Celestino answered. His dark eyes probed at the bushes. "There ees nothing here. Maybe further along, eh?"

The Rio Kid didn't answer at once. He sat as still as a statue, every sense stretched to the uttermost. Saber's ears pricked forward, then swiveled around to test each vagrant breath of air. At last the Rio Kid settled more firmly in the saddle.

"I reckon yuh're right, amigo. Somebody's waitin' in that canyon. We'll circle around

and come up on the rim. Ride slow and careful and be ready for trouble."

"Si, General. I have him four eyes, eh?"

"With Apaches, sometimes four ain't enough."

They moved cautiously and once more Saber shivered. Again the Rio Kid drew rein but could neither see nor hear anything. He scanned the jagged skyline, but nothing appeared against it. Then he heard a sound behind him and twisted around. From the canyon behind him streamed a group of horsemen, with Cholla Reagan at their head.

THE Rio Kid slapped a hasty shot at the renegades and touched Saber with his spurs. Celestino swore, raked the gray, and raced just behind the dun. There was no time to attempt to scale the steep slopes. Bullets already whined around their ears. The two trail companions headed directly into the dark maw of the canyon ahead.

They streaked into its mouth, the Rio Kid twisting around, both sixes in his hands, lining down on the pursuing renegades. A noose dropped silently around him and was jerked tight. Celestino yelled with alarm as another dropped over him. The Rio Kid was lifted out of saddle, arms pinned tightly to his sides. The breath was jolted from him as he hit the ground, and the world spun dizzily.

Cholla and the gunmen came thundering up. Men jumped from their saddles and threw themselves on the Rio Kid and Celestino. They were jerked to their feet. The Rio Kid had managed to hold onto his sixes, but was too groggy to use them. They were taken from him and Celestino was quickly disarmed. Saber had raced on a few yards and then stood still.

Cholla Reagan carried a heavy Colt in his hand, the hammer dogged back. He grinned at the Rio Kid and lifted his head toward the rim above.

"Hold them ropes tight, hombres," he ordered. "If these gents get proddy, spur yore broncs."

Reagan moved in closer, his stubble-faced crew pressing in behind him. The gunhawk grinned, while his muddy eyes glittered triumphantly.

"We saw yuh comin' and figgered out this little trap," he gloated. "Yuh shore run like a woolly lamb right where we wanted yuh to. The boys on the rim couldn't miss yuh with their loops."

The Rio Kid said nothing. He saw that Celestino was shaken up, but unharmed. At a word from Reagan the lariats were loosened and the ropes lifted from the prisoners' heads. Reagan kept his six leveled, but his coarse voice became more affable.

"I told yuh mebbe we'd meet, Rio Kid, but I shore didn't expect it like this."

"Did yuh shoot Buck Nolan?" the Rio Kid demanded.

Reagan chuckled. "Is he dead?"

"No," the Rio Kid answered. "He'll get over the slug."

Reagan's face fell. "Now I got to do better'n that next time. "Course, he rushed me a little."

"Who sent yuh to get Buck?" the Rio Kid snapped.

"That ain't none of yore business," Reagan growled. "Yuh talk mighty uppity to a man that could blast yuh down here and now. Get his hoss, Utah, and we'll take him along to the camp."

"I'll call Saber myself," the Rio Kid said curtly. "Yore men won't get in ten yards of him."

He whistled and Saber came trotting up, the gray close at his flank. The horse circled the knot of men and came directly toward the Rio Kid.

One of the renegades reached for the bridle as the dun passed. Saber's ears flattened and the animal's head swung around with the speed of a striking snake. The powerful teeth snapped a split second after the man jerked his arm aside. Saber came on to the Rio Kid's side and stood there, mirled eye flashing fire at the gunhawks.

"What a hoss!" Reagan breathed. "He'll shore wear my brand."

"Saber never will," the Rio Kid said.

"Yuh won't be carin', after we're through with yuh," Reagan said, and his grin widened. "Climb aboard and don't try ridin' off. Even that hoss can't outrun a forty-four slug."

The Rio Kid and Celestino swung into leather. The renegades formed around them and Reagan, mounted, led the way down the canyon. He cut sharply to the right when the canyon opened and climbed higher into the broken country. The Rio Kid knew that they were now close to the San Carlos Reservation.

At last the band headed into a little pocket in the hills where three small huts stood. The men dismounted.

"Yuh'll stay here awhile," Reagan said to the Rio Kid. "The last time yuh was in these hills, yuh got away from my sights."

"You was the bushwhacker with the telescope rifle," the Rio Kid said.

"I give yuh credit for movin' fast," Reagan admitted. "I had yuh direct on the cross hairs three times. I was hopin' yuh'd trail me that day. The boys was waitin' here for me, and it would have been easy to cut the three of yuh down."

BOTH the Rio Kid and Celestino were hustled into one of the shacks, locked in, and left to their own devices. A glance around the walls told them they would not escape. There were no windows, and the thick plank door was shut and padlocked on the outside. The Rio Kid settled wearily on the hard-packed earth, broad back against the rough logs. Celestino paced back and forth a while, then sighed and hunkered down himself. He made a cigarette.

"What we do, General?" he asked.

"Wait," the Rio Kid said shortly. He listened to the sounds the renegades made outside as they prepared for a stay in the valley. "I don't figger Reagan will gun us down hisself. He's holdin' us for somebody."

"That weel be either Senor Stuart or Senor Holliday," Celestino said. He inhaled deeply on his cigarette.

"Stuart, most likely. Doc's just a hired hand like Reagan. We're slated for forty-four slugs when Stuart comes, amigo. We got to figger some way of gettin' out of this mess before then."

Celestino said nothing, and the partners settled into a morose silence. The time passed, and gradually daylight waned. Just at dusk, footsteps approached the cabin, and the heavy padlocked rattled. The Rio Kid and Celestino came to their feet.

Three men crowded in the door. Reagan and a gunhawk remained near the entrance, sixes in their hands. A third renegade unceremoniously placed food on the floor. Reagan leaned against the door post and the third man disappeared, to return a few moments later with a lamp that chased the dark shadows out of the corners.

"Eat while yuh can." Reagan grinned. "Yuh never know which meal will be yore last."

"Why not salivate us and be done with it?" the Rio Kid demanded.

Reagan shook his head. "Not me. I figger yuh're worth a heap of dinero in Cholla Reagan's pockets once yuh're turned over to the right gent. He'll be along tomorrer or the next day."

"Red Stuart," the Rio Kid said flatly, and started eating.

"That's close enough," Reagan said.

As the two ate, Reagan boasted of the trap he had set on the spur of the moment to catch the two trail companions. The Rio Kid felt a flush of shame that he had been tricked, but he didn't allow it to show.

"Won't be long," Reagan was saying, "before I'll be through at Globe. The dinero I get for you will shore paint a town or two red."

The meal was finished in silence and at last the renegades backed out, guns still leveled, and the padlock was snapped into place. The Rio Kid and Celestino made themselves as comfortable as possible on the bare floor and slept fitfully until dawn.

In the morning they were fed again, and allowed outside for a short time. Reagan seemed to have little fear that his prisoners would escape, nor did the Rio Kid find even the ghost of a chance. Their guard remained several paces behind them, too far to rush before he could blast them down. On their return to the cabin, the door was left open, though guarded by a man with a rifle.

Late in the afternoon two Apaches came suddenly out of the draws, riding shaggy little mustangs that looked to have a great deal of stamina. The Rio Kid watched them ride toward the cabins without the least fear. Someone called and Reagan came out to greet his visitors.

Both Indians carried good repeating carbines. Their dark bodies glistened in the sun and their black hair was held back from their faces by a dirty band of cloth across the forehead. Breech clouts and the usual high moccasins completed their apparel.

Reagan spoke in rapid Spanish that the Rio Kid readily understood.

"You are welcome, my brothers."

"Where is Eyes-Like-A-Rock?" one of the Indians demanded. He lifted his carbine. "He has promised us more bullets and those we have are about gone."

"Eyes-Like-A-Rock will be here soon," Reagan promised.

The Indians dismounted. One of them looked familiar to the Rio Kid, and he frowned as he watched the man trail into Reagan's cabin behind the big gunhawk.

CHAPTER XIV

Escape

LONG minutes passed while Reagan and the Indians remained inside. When they reappeared, both Indians and Reagan came directly toward the Rio Kid's prison. They halted not far from the door and glared at the two captives. The Indians wore wide stripes of paint across their hawklike features, and thin lips smiled in cruel mirth at the Rio Kid and Celestino. The taller of the two Apaches turned suddenly to Reagan, a coppery arm waving toward the prisoners.

"My brother will give these to the Apache," he said in Spanish. "We will see what men they are. We will cut off their eyelids and stake them out in the sun."

Reagan's face lighted as he watched the Rio Kid and Celestino. He could picture the methods Apaches had of torturing their prisoners. But he regretfully shook his head.

"Can't do it," he answered in Spanish.

The Apache drew up, face clouding in anger.

"You are brother to the Apache. The Apache is your brother. Is this too much to give?" His hand dropped to a heavy knife in his breech clout. "Our blades are thirsty for their blood and you are one with us."

"Now look." Reagan's worry showed clearly on his coarse face. "I've got to hold these hombres until Eyes-Like-A-Rock comes. He wants to see them alive. Perhaps then he will turn them over to you."

The Apache stared hard at Reagan, then looked slowly at the other renegades who had gathered. He gave the Rio Kid a glance filled with hatred.

"We will wait," he said shortly and turned away.

Reagan blew out his breath in a heavy puff of relief. He caught the Rio Kid's cold glance, and his thick lips twisted in a smile.

"I don't envy yuh none, amigo. Better say yore prayers."

He walked away, following the Apaches who stalked in aloof dignity toward his cabin. Once more the three disappeared.

At sundown the two prisoners were fed, the door closed and padlocked. They heard the guard take his place and listened to the noises of the camp.

"General," Celestino's voice came out of the dark, steady and unexcited, "we weel be turned over to thees Apache?"

"Looks like it," the Rio Kid answered heavily.

"Then maybe we make heem the escape, eh?"

"I wish I knew how," the Rio Kid answered. "Our guns and knives are gone. The guards won't get near us, and keep cocked sixes in their hands. Can yuh figger any way out of it?"

"No," Celestino said, and returned to silence again. In a few moments he stirred. "I have theenk, amigo, that maybe eet is best we face the renegade Colts rather than thees Apache and their torture."

"Yuh're right, Celestino. This gent, Eyes-Like-A-Rock, will be here tomorrer. He'll turn us over to the Apaches and it'll be too late to make a break then. How about tryin' first thing in the mornin' when they bring our eats?"

"That ees good, General. We try heem then."

They settled themselves once more for the long night on the bare floor. Both men knew that they faced almost certain death in the morning when they would try for freedom, but neither worried much about it.

Gradually the noises of the camp died. The Rio Kid lay in the darkness, trying to evolve some plan that would at least give them a chance in the morning. He recalled the position each man generally took. The two men at the door would be the immediate danger. He could tackle them while Celestino attacked the man with the food, trying to get his gun.

Suddenly the Rio Kid stiffened. He thought he heard a low moan outside the locked door. He strained to listen, sitting up, but he heard no further sound. He was about to lay back down again when he heard the soft clink of the padlock.

Celestino's low hiss cut through the darkness of their prison.

The sound came again and then the door edged open, slowly. The Rio Kid and Celestino were on their feet, crouched, ready for trouble. The door opened wider and faint starlight touched the naked figure of an Apache. Instantly the Rio Kid lunged forward, hands reaching for the Indian's throat.

THE Indian spoke with swift urgency, low.

"Pryor? Take it easy, old man. I'm Darrell Duppa."

"Duppa!" the Rio Kid repeated blankly.

The Indian chuckled. "That's right. I say, you're very complimentary about my disguise." He stepped inside and handed the Rio Kid a brace of sixes he pulled from his breech clout. "Not yours, I'm afraid, but they'll do."

"The guard?" the Rio Kid asked.

"I regret I had to knife him. The gentleman was too obnoxiously alert. Can you get your horses with little noise?"

"I think so. Saber will come at my whistle and Celestino's gray will follow."

"Then on your way. I don't think there'll be an alarm until morning. I believe I can arrange tracks for Mr. Reagan to follow that will utterly confuse him. Good riding, old man. See you in Globe some day."

Duppa disappeared as silently as he had come. The Rio Kid eagerly broke the sixes and saw the dull wink of cartridges in the chamber. He passed one to Celestino and the two men slipped outside the cabin. The other huts were dark. A horse stamped lazily in the pole corral beyond, the only noise in the night.

The Rio Kid moved out, heading toward a huddled shadow on the ground. He bent over the guard for a moment, then straightened and passed a heavy knife and rifle to Celestino. He shoved the guard's Colt in his own second holster. They moved on, passing as silent as shadows before the cabins and creeping toward the pole corral.

They approached cautiously so as not to alarm the renegades' mounts. The Rio Kid whistled, a low, soft sound, and confidently moved to the gate. Saber appeared and, behind him, Celestino's gray. Saddles lay outside the corral where the renegades had dropped them. The Rio Kid worked silently with the fastening and at last opened the gate. Saber trotted through.

Working as quickly as they could in the dark, the two men saddled their mounts. They gave another searching glance toward the silent, sleeping camp, then swung into leather. Giving Saber his head, but holding the animal down to a slow walk, the partners drifted away toward the entrance of the valley.

Once there, the Rio Kid increased the speed and they fled down the canyon that led to freedom and safety. They placed several miles between themselves and the renegades before they slowed their pace. The gray pulled up beside Saber and Celestino's wide smile flashed in his dark face.

"General, we should be most thankful for Senor Duppa."

"We owe our lives to him," the Rio Kid agreed. "Rushin' the guard was mighty close to plain suicide."

"*Si*," Celestino said gravely. "But better than the Apache."

The Rio Kid wished that there could be some way to watch the renegade camp. He badly wanted a glimpse of Eyes-Like-A-Rock, but that would be running too great a chance. The gunslammers would be stirred up like a bunch of angry hornets when they found their prisoners gone and the guard dead.

Regretfully, the Rio Kid decided that his best plan would be to head back to Globe. Duppa, as an Apache, would be able to identify Eyes-Like-A-Rock and would report to Clum or the Rio Kid the first chance he had.

The two men headed almost due west, for the Rio Kid was certain that Reagan would instantly search for them in the direction of Globe. In a few hours, the Rio Kid headed Saber into a small draw and called a halt. There the two slept fitfully until the sun tipped the broken country to the east.

They saddled and headed southward. By now the dead guard and empty cabin would have been discovered back at the renegade camp. Where the Rio Kid was now, he was fairly certain that they would not blunder onto any of the gunhawks, but he took no chances. He and Celestino examined each stretch of open country as they entered it, and both were ready for blasting action at a split second's warning.

Two hours later they came on a detachment of cavalry and learned that General Miles was not far behind. The Rio Kid reported the country ahead free of Apaches and rode on toward the main body of troops. In a short time they came on the column and were taken instantly to the commander.

General Miles sat his horse straight and grim as the Rio Kid made his report.

"If there's Injuns around, General, I never saw any. Like I said, they must be strikin' in another direction, pullin' yuh out of Globe on a wild goose chase."

"Maybe at Globe itself," Miles said harshly.

He called an aide and snapped orders that

sent the officer hurrying away. The general faced the Rio Kid.

"You'll accompany me back to Globe, Captain Pryor."

MILES left two forces in the area to take care of such small bands of Apaches as might be operating in the foothills. He returned to Globe with the main body, arriving there in the late afternoon. The Rio Kid and Celestino followed him into his tent. He turned swiftly after unbuckling his saber and gun-belt, square face hard and angry.

"Let me hear your story again, Captain."

The Rio Kid repeated the narrative, starting with the letter from Clum and leading up to his capture and escape from Cholla Reagan. He told of the Mid-Arizona's investments where the other companies were folding up and pulling out.

The General paced for a while, then sat down behind his desk. He broke in now and then with a sharp question. At last the Rio Kid finished, and Miles tugged thoughtfully at his lower lip.

"I am utterly astounded by this, Captain Pryor. I can hardly bring myself to believe that a company would deliberately resort to murder and an Indian uprising to gain its own ends."

"That's the way it stands, sir. Besides, there's somebody behind Stuart, who's furnishin' the dinero and brains."

Miles looked at him sharply. "Do you know who he is?"

"No, he keeps hisself hid."

"Then we'll smoke him out. The Mining Association should be warned of that rattler. And how about Eyes-Like-a-Rock?"

"I don't know who he is, but I'd place my chips on Doc Holliday. He takes orders from Red Stuart, and that hombre smashes whatever gets in his way. This Reagan gent is Holliday's segundo. He handles the bush-whackin' end of the business."

Miles passed his hand over his face.

"It makes a good, sound story, Captain Pryor, and I personally don't doubt you. But you admit there's no proof against either Stuart or Holliday, or the Mid-Arizona. I can't do a thing to check them unless there is."

"I realize that." The Rio Kid nodded. "But I figgered yuh needed to know what's behind the Apache raids."

"Now Reagan is something else," Miles said forcefully. "He has definitely overplayed his hand. I can order his arrest by the military command for stirring up the Apaches. That charge might not stick, but at least we might work the gentleman into the mood to talk. That will be some help."

The Rio Kid arose.

"Reagan's arrest will cause Mid-Arizona a heap of trouble, if nothin' else," Pryor admitted. "Stuart and Holliday won't know how much the man has talked and they'll be worried."

"The arrest order will be issued immediately," General Miles said.

Leaving the camp, the Rio Kid and Celestino rode into Globe. Already there were indications that the panic had blown over. Most of the Home Guard loafed around the street, glad to let the Army fight its battles.

After leaving the horses at the livery stable, the Rio Kid and Celestino went to the hotel. They cleaned up, and stretched out on the bed, after locking the door. In a few moments they were sound asleep.

CHAPTER XV

Western Decides

HOURS went by while both men slept like logs. It was already dusk when the Rio Kid awoke and rolled over. Celestino still slept, and the Rio Kid quietly moved about the room. He stood by the window a moment, looking thoughtfully out on Globe's crowded street. He wondered what move he should make next.

Reagan would probably not show up at Globe again, unless he was captured by some detachment of cavalry. By now Doc Holliday and Red Stuart must know that Reagan was wanted, and subject to arrest on sight.

The next move would be up to them, and the Rio Kid saw that his only chance was to keep a close eye on the movements of those two. If he could rattle them so that they would make some foolish move, he might be much closer to pinning their guilt upon them. With a sigh the Rio Kid turned from the window and awakened Celestino.

They ate heartily in the hotel dining room,

then went to Rae Heaton's home. Buck was much better, though he probably would be in bed for months. The Rio Kid told what had happened. A light of triumph came in Buck's eyes and his big fist clenched about the covers.

"That's one jasper less," he said. "Yuh don't give yoreself enough credit, Rio Kid. How about Stuart?"

"Can't be touched," the Rio Kid sighed, "unless I prod him into it. I don't know how that can be done right now."

A few minutes later he cut short the visit, and Rae followed him to the door. She looked thoughtful and troubled, and at last the Rio Kid bluntly asked what was bothering her.

"General worry, nothing more," she answered with a slight smile. She sobered instantly. "How much longer will we have to remain in Globe?"

"I don't know," the Rio Kid replied. "Depends on how soon the Injuns get corralled. Now don't plan on ranchin' till that happens. Yore place was hit once, and the red devils can raid it again."

"I won't move so long as Buck is sick," she promised, and laughed. "Don't worry about me. I'll get along."

[*Turn page*]

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She would say nothing more and the two visitors left, walking slowly down the street. They turned the corner into Broad. Lights and noise from the saloons were proof enough that Globe was no longer worried about the Apaches, at least until the next fright came along.

"What ees next?" Celestino asked.

"For tonight, not a cursed thing!" the Rio Kid exclaimed. "You and me won't think once of copper, or Apaches or renegades. We'll start out fresh tomorrer and I got an idea a night's relaxation will help a whole lot to clear our brains."

"I have thought that, too," Celestino agreed. He grinned crookedly, and jerked his finger toward a sign tacked to a blank wall. "But, General, one more theeng. General Miles has not wasted the time."

The Rio Kid moved closer and struck a match. The notice was brief and curt, stating that the Commanding General of the Arizona Department called on all citizens to assist in the capture and arrest of Cholla Reagan, wanted on charges of deliberately and maliciously stirring up the Apache Indians of San Carlos Reservation, of arming them and of selling them whisky and other spirituous liquors. The Rio Kid snuffed out the match and whistled.

"Miles shore made it strong. I bet there's a heap of folks around Globe would like to get their gunsights on Reagan right now."

They passed two more of the brief notices before they turned into the first saloon. Miles had done an excellent job of telling the whole town about Reagan. The two partners pushed through the batwings and instantly halted.

The crowd was usual for such a place, but it was not a noisy crowd. The Rio Kid instantly sensed the tension in the big room and saw how each man glared at the two men who stood alone in a cleared space before the bar. Red Stuart, one of them, looked grim, but his eyes constantly searched for a way out of the saloon. Doc Holliday, the other, leaned his back against the bar, his elbows taking his weight, his tapered hands hanging loosely over his sixes. A half smile touched his skull-like face.

"Any of you gents get real proddy, make yore move," he said quietly, as the Rio Kid and Celestino stepped in.

"Shore Reagan worked for us," Stuart said angrily. "But we didn't know he was this kind of skunk."

"Yuh're lyin'," the Rio Kid said quietly.

Every eye in the place jumped toward him. Stuart spun half-around. Holliday's cold eyes lighted, and he stepped away from the bar, ready for trouble.

"Yuh hired Reagan to start the trouble," the Rio Kid said. "He was on yore payroll and yuh know what he did. I myself saw him mighty friendly with a couple of armed Apaches. There's another gent the Injuns call Eyes-Like-A-Rock. I wonder who he is."

"Rio Kid," Holliday almost whispered, "I think I've waited long enough for that showdown. This is it!"

"Doc!" Stuart grabbed the ex-dentist.

Holliday impatiently threw off his hand, but Stuart at last spun the man half around.

"Have yuh gone plumb loco?" Stuart yelled. "Look at that crowd! Yuh can't fight 'em all."

"I can and I will," Doc snapped.

"Use yore head," Stuart pleaded. "We're innocent, but if yuh take to gunplay, nobody will believe yuh."

DOC HOLLIDAY stared coldly at his boss and deliberately shrugged off his restraining hand. He turned to face the Rio Kid, his fingers hovering over his sixes. He seemed to strain forward. The Rio Kid met his glare. The crowd hastily parted to be out of the line of fire.

Red Stuart stood immobile, indecision written clearly on his square, red face. The Rio Kid had slowly slipped into a crouch, eyes narrowed, waiting the first flicker of movement from Holliday's hands. The crowded room was deathly silent, each man strained forward, face set.

Suddenly Stuart grabbed Doc's wrists. The dentist instantly turned into a fighting fury, lips writhing back from his teeth. He tried to twist his hands free but Stuart's strength proved too much for him. After a few moments he burst into a fit of coughing that threatened to tear his lungs from his body. He leaned weakly against the bar, still coughing, and Red Stuart lifted the man's guns from the holsters.

"Doc's plumb loco when he's mad. He didn't think. Doc is as eager to see Reagan hung for stirrin' up the Apaches as I am, or any one of yuh. Doc was roweled and he lost his head, like any of yuh might."

He turned and pulled Doc from the bar. He led the cadaverous gunhawk down the cleared aisle toward the door. As he passed

the Rio Kid, Stuart gave him a swift glance, filled with hate and a promise that there would be another time. The Rio Kid felt as though Stuart had actually spoken the words aloud.

The batwings swung to behind Stuart and Holliday, and Doc's cough echoed weakly back. The silence that held the crowd broke and the Rio Kid found himself the center of a questioning ring. He broke away as quickly as he could and slipped out the door.

He waited until Celestino managed to join him, then led the way to the hotel. Word would spread quickly through Globe, and the Rio Kid did not want to answer any more questions about Stuart and the Apaches. In their room, Celestino lit a cigarette and grinned at the Rio Kid.

"I theenk maybe we take care of thees Doc tonight."

"Stuart had to hold him back." The Rio Kid sank down on the bed. "I saw a way of rattling them two gents. The whispers all over Globe will hook 'em into the San Carlos trouble. They'll be under suspicion and Stuart knows that. Like tonight, he didn't dare let Doc call a showdown. That would have been the same as admittin' I knew the truth and had to be shut up."

"What weel they do next?" Celestino wondered.

The Rio Kid shook his head.

"That's hard to say. I reckon for a while Stuart won't make any moves that'll make suspicion any deeper. He'll want this to blow over."

"Maybe, though," Celestino suggested, "he is more afraid of you than these suspicions, eh? I theenk maybe I watch you very close."

"Suit yourself"—the Rio Kid smiled—"but I don't think I'm in much danger for a while. It looks, amigo, like we take our relaxation in sleep."

"*Por Dios,* not even one dreenk!" Celestino sighed.

In the morning there was more evidence that the Mid-Arizona and Red Stuart were under suspicion. In the hotel dining room, the Rio Kid caught snatches of conversation about the company, and he had to be short and brusque to rid himself of a couple of curious men.

He and Celestino went out on the street, started toward Rae's house to see Buck Nolan. They had gone but a few yards when the Rio Kid stopped short, eyes narrowed on the offices of the Western Mining Company. It was tightly closed and the Rio Kid didn't like the implications of that.

With a brief word to his friend, he crossed the street. He rattled the door but no one answered. A man leaning against the far corner of the building came sauntering up.

"Yuh ain't going to raise anybody," he said. "They've done sold out—gone away."

"Who'd they sell to?" the Rio Kid asked.

"I just loaf around outside." The man grinned. "They don't tell me their business."

The Rio Kid turned thoughtfully from the door, eyes clouded. With sudden determination, he strode away. Celestino matched his long stride as he left Broad Street and turned into one of the residential streets. In a few moments he knocked on the door of one of the better homes of the town. Breck Long answered.

"Heard yuh sold out," the Rio Kid said.

"Yesterday," Long acknowledged.

"Mind tellin' me why and who yuh sold to?"

"I think you'd better come inside," Long said drily, and stepped back to let the two men enter.

HE LED the way to a stiff, formal parlor. He waved his guests to chairs, and sat down.

"The home office ordered the sale and want to transfer me to Minnesota," he said then. "However, I'm getting along in years and I like it in Arizona. I think I'll turn down the new post."

"Who bought yore business?"

"Mid-Arizona," Breck answered. "We have been bargaining for some time. I had thought their offer ridiculously low and wouldn't recommend action on it to the home office. Then the Apaches cut loose. We've lost considerably here."

"But why couldn't yuh hold on?"

Long hesitated before he spoke again.

"I've told you before, Pryor, that Western is only a subsidiary of a world-wide syndicate. It's powerful, and wealthy enough that it need not hold on to any property if it shows a loss. That has always been their policy. Globe started losing and the company would have sold right away. I've worked for months to persuade them to hold on."

"But they sold," the Rio Kid said.

"Yes, they took a loss here which they'll make up in Minnesota or South America, or somewhere else in the world."

"I'd hoped yuh'd keep fightin'," the Rio Kid

said, and slapped his fist into his palm.

"Western does its own deciding," explained Long, "several thousand miles away from here. We sold at a sacrifice, all our property, options, machinery and workings. It's all a part of Mid-Arizona now. Here, I'll give you some idea of what we've lost."

He arose and walked to a desk in the corner, bending over to scribble some figures on a piece of paper. He handed it to the Rio Kid and tapped the bottom row.

"That's losing money, and that's what the Apache raids have cost us. I can say that the loss will continue for a while and Western was not willing to take it. The Mid-Arizona offer cuts some of the loss."

"Any other company figgerin' on sellin'?" the Rio Kid asked.

"I don't know, honestly, though there's talk. Midas Mining is shaky. It's a small company located solely in the Globe region."

"Yuh'll stay with the association?"

"If I leave Western, yes," Breck replied. "I'll have more time to give to the problems facing the copper industry generally, among them the Apache. You can depend on it, I'll help you all I can."

"I'm glad of that," the Rio Kid said and arose.

He held out his hand and Breck took it.

CHAPTER XVI

Counter-Move

GRIMLY the Rio Kid walked along the street, with a faraway look in his eyes. He frowned, rubbed his hand along his jaw and suddenly faced Celestino.

"Let's ride to see General Miles," he said. "There's some questions I want to ask him."

They walked to the stable where they saddled their horses. Once more Saber showed his pleasure in being on the move and the Rio Kid had to hold him in along the road to the Army camp.

A sweat-stained horse stood with drooping head before Miles' tent and the Rio Kid had to wait. He watched the life of the camp, again feeling the call to the old life. He turned when a man left Miles' headquarters, his blue uniform covered with a film of dust.

An orderly signaled the Rio Kid. General Miles made him welcome and picked up a dispatch.

"Here's word about that raiding party that was headed for Globe," he informed.

"What devilment this time?" the Rio Kid asked.

"They veered off, just as you thought they would, sending a few warriors down this way to keep Globe stirred up and pinned down close. The main band hit a big mining installation, evidently caught them by surprise."

"A massacre," the Rio Kid said, his face tightening.

Miles sighed and dropped the dispatch.

"Lieutenant Roberts reports it that way. Not a worker left alive. Stores looted and everything burned. They caved in the shaft and blew the rest to smithereens."

"Blew!" the Rio Kid sat upright.

"Dynamite," Miles nodded.

The Rio Kid came slowly out of his chair. "What company owned them workin's?"

"Midas."

"Red Stuart and Doc Holliday again. General, Apaches don't give all their attention to mines, like this San Carlos bunch. They may burn and kill, but they don't use dynamite."

"It's the first time I've heard of it," Miles agreed.

"White leaders were there, or those Apaches were white men painted up. Breck Long told me this mornin' he didn't know if Midas could hold out or not. Now what do yuh think will happen?"

"Midas will sell if it can."

"And Stuart has won hisself another hand!"

"Proof, man!" Miles leaned over his desk and his face was harsh and grim. "Men like that should be placed before the firing squad!"

"I haven't got the proof," the Rio Kid said. "Only suspicions, but a heap of them. Yuh can't use suspicions in a court, though, or jail a man on 'em. Stuart and the unknown gent behind him knows that."

"What can you do?" Miles asked. "I'm certainly unable to check the man and his company."

"Do you know if Clum told anybody he was sendin' for me?" the Rio Kid asked.

Miles looked slightly surprised. "No, I can't tell you. John might have said something to someone else, but not to me."

"Stuart knew about me too blame soon, and

was waitin' for me when I come to Tucson. Where'd he get his information?"

"I don't know," Miles said helplessly. "There must have been a leak in his office."

"Clum wrote that letter and posted it hisself." The Rio Kid shook his head. "He's at San Carlos now. I'm gettin' off a letter to him today, proddin' him to hurry things up and get down here. General, all we can do is set tight. I'm tryin' to get a line that will lead to Stuart and the man behind in Globe. Between Clum, Duppa and my suspicions, mebbe we can get somewheres."

"In a hurry, I hope," Miles said. His fists tightened. "If those Apaches are not checked soon, blamed if I don't think I'll march right into San Carlos and make me some good Indians."

"That's the Indian Agency's job," the Rio Kid warned, and the officer swore luridly under his breath.

"Get your letter off," he said. "Let me know when you've learned anything more. Whoever's behind this San Carlos trouble faces a Federal charge, and no local lawman or court will get him. I will."

THE Rio Kid rode back to Globe, and Celestino took the horses around to the stable while the Rio Kid bought paper and envelopes. He spent some time writing the letter to Clum, but at last it was finished. A supply train was leaving for the reservation late in the afternoon under military escort, and the Rio Kid gave the letter to one of the drivers.

At the moment there was nothing else he could do. It was late afternoon and the sun already touched the western hills. Though he would have been welcome for supper at Rae Heaton's, the Rio Kid and Celestino ate at the hotel in order to save her extra work.

After dinner, the Rio Kid made it a point to go by the Mid-Arizona offices. The place was still open and a lamp burned back in Stuart's private office. The clerk looked up from the counter and glared as the Rio Kid and Celestino passed. There was no sign of Doc Holliday.

"Stuart must have some sort of deal on," the Rio Kid commented to Celestino. "I'd shore like to know what it is."

"Maybe he is not there, amigo," Celestino suggested. "Maybe thees clerk wait for heem."

The Rio Kid left the Mid-Arizona and continued strolling up the walk. They turned at the next corner and sauntered to Rae's home. A lamp made a cheerful glow in the front room window and a dimmer one marked the bedroom where Buck lay recovering from his wound. Only when the Rio Kid had stepped up on the porch and knocked, did he realize that Rae had visitors.

She opened the door and looked troubled at sight of him. The Rio Kid stiffened when he saw that her visitors were Red Stuart and Doc Holliday. The cadaverous dentist showed no sign of the seizure of the night before. He smiled frostily and arose from his chair, eyes narrowing.

"They want to buy my spread," Rae said.

The Rio Kid glanced swiftly toward the bedroom door and saw that it was closed.

"Does Buck know these skunks are here?"

"No. He's asleep." Rae looked hard at Red Stuart. "They have been insisting that I sell—tonight."

"Why?" the Rio Kid asked coldly.

Holliday cleared his throat and spoke softly. "Seems like everywhere I go, yuh're interferin', Rio Kid."

"I'll handle this, Doc," Stuart said swiftly.

Holliday glared at him, then subsided. Stuart turned to the Rio Kid, his red face grim and angry.

"This is between me and Miss Heaton. Yuh've caused enough trouble, and I'm like Doc. Yuh're beginnin' to annoy me."

"I plan to keep it up," the Rio Kid snapped. "What's their offer, Miss Rae?"

"Not much. They claim that the other companies are no longer interested in copper, and are pulling out. The Western has sold and the Midas will be next. Both of them bid for mineral rights but Father hadn't made up his mind when—he was killed."

"More companies are droppin' out," Stuart put in hastily. "None of them will buy yore copper. I might have had some patience, but the Rio Kid has changed my mind. Take my offer now, or yuh'll never sell an ounce to anybody else."

"Is that a threat?" the Rio Kid demanded.

Doc Holliday slightly shifted his position, but the Rio Kid paid no attention to him. Celestino would check any sidewinding plays that might come up.

"No threat from me." Stuart shook his head. "Mid-Arizona has bought up all around yuh, Miss Heaton. No company will buy into yore deposits because there's not enough copper to dig for on yore place alone. I can—but if yuh don't sell here and now, I won't."

Rae Heaton searchingly met his gaze. She turned to the Rio Kid, frankly puzzled and worried. He smiled down at her.

"Trust me?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Buck does, and so do I—fully."

"No sale, Stuart." The Rio Kid lifted his head. "Yuh just as well walk out and forget the Heaton ranch and Buck Nolan's spread. Yuh'll never own 'em."

Stuart made a slight signal. Instantly Celestino's voice cut in, cold as death.

"Senor Doc, I have thees gun lined on your chest. Eet would be very bad to put your blood on the floor. Senorita would not like heem. Touch your Colt, Senor Doc, and thees rug she's ruined."

DOC jerked half-around, his fingers hovering close to his gun butt. Celestino's steady six covered him and the dark thumb held back the hammer. The Rio Kid's cold eyes bored into Stuart's, challenging and waiting.

"Doc, drop yore six on the chair beside yuh," the Rio Kid ordered calmly. "That goes for you, Stuart."

"I'll kill yuh for this!" Stuart said through set teeth.

"I don't doubt yuh'll try," the Rio Kid agreed. "But drop yore six."

The Rio Kid's hands blurred and his own Colt jumped into his fingers. It lined on Stuart's chest and the man slowly lifted his own Colt from under his coat and placed it on the table. He stepped away from it. Holliday had followed orders, but there were two high red spots in his sallow cheeks.

"Now get out," the Rio Kid ordered, "and leave Miss Heaton alone. Start movin' before I pitch yuh both out."

"Rio Kid," Doc said evenly, "yuh've just about played to the end of yore string. I want to be around when it frazzles out."

"Yore privilege," the Rio Kid snapped.

"Next time, I won't stop Holliday," Stuart said, voice shaking.

The Rio Kid gave him a contemptuous glance.

"Don't yuh ever do yore own dirty work?" he asked.

Stuart drew a deep breath, then stalked out the door. Doc Holliday moved more slowly behind him. In mockery, Doc bowed to Rae, and gently closed the door after him.

The Rio Kid and Celestino holstered their guns, after they heard Stuart and Holliday walk rapidly away down the plank sidewalk. Rae sank into a chair, giving a glance at the closed bedroom door.

"They insisted I talk to them," she said.

"It did no harm unless yuh sold," the Rio Kid said, and dismissed the stormy interview. "They're gettin' anxious to finish up their buyin' before somebody gets too close to the truth."

"Buck wouldn't have liked for me even to talk to them," Rae said.

She slipped to the bedroom door and quietly opened it. Buck still slept.

The Rio Kid and Celestino remained at the house for most of the evening. Later, Buck awoke but none of them said anything about the visitors. At last the Rio Kid arose to go, and he motioned Rae to follow him to the door.

"I'm leavin' Celestino here tonight," he said. "Stuart and Holliday may not be back, but I'm takin' no chances."

"There's no need," Rae protested, but the Rio Kid would not listen.

He had a few quiet words with the young Mexican, said good night, and left. Out on the dark walk, he paused and looked back at the house. It would be safe enough with Celestino there.

The Rio Kid turned and walked slowly toward Broad Street and the hotel. Almost half a block away he passed a thick clump of bushes. He didn't hear a sound, but something cold and hard pressed into his side.

"Elevate, hombre!" a coarse voice said quietly.

The Rio Kid flinched, tensed, and the gun muzzle dug deeper. He raised his arms. Instantly other silent forms circled the bushes. The Rio Kid's sixes were lifted from their holsters. His arms were roughly jerked down and lashed behind his back.

The Rio Kid knew he had no chance. That gun barrel spoke louder than all the warnings he had ever heard.

"You be good, yuh won't be hurt," the coarse-voiced renegade warned him. "But don't get any ideas. Yuh won't live to see 'em through."

Next Issue: HOGAN FURY, a Manhunt Story by CLEE WOODS

CHAPTER XVII

Missing

QUICKLY the Rio Kid was hustled along the bushes to an alley. They paused there while his captor whistled, a shrill blast that carried far. In a moment two more men appeared—Doc Holliday and Red Stuart!

"The smart gent," Stuart sneered. "Well, I reckon before long we'll see how smart yuh really are. Let's get to ridin'."

Once more the Rio Kid was hustled along, this time to the far corner of the alley and the street. Horses waited there and the Rio Kid was bodily loaded onto one. Stuart and Holliday mounted, remaining close to their captive. At a quiet word they rode southward, avoiding the lighted streets of the town.

At the edge of Globe they pulled up, and for a long moment Stuart sat straight and silent, his eyes boring into the Rio Kid's. Without warning, he suddenly smashed his fist into the Rio Kid's face. Only Bob Pryor's quick grab of his knees and the frantic grip of his fingers on the cantle kept him from falling. He tasted blood and felt the trickle of it on his lips.

"That's just a sample," Stuart snarled.

He pulled something from his pocket and struck a match. The Rio Kid's hard eyes showed no expression as he recognized the letter he had written to Clum just that morning. Stuart tantalizingly held the letter half-extended, then ripped it to shreds.

"Yuh never know where our men are, Rio Kid," he gloated. "Even Clum talked to the wrong man once. All along yuh've tried to buck us, but that's over now. We've put too much into this plan of ours to let yuh upset it."

"Boot Hill, I suppose?" the Rio Kid asked.

Stuart nodded.

"But not at our hands. There's some Apache friends of ours who can do the work for us. Yuh'll mebbe never be found. If yuh are, everyone knows there's been Injun trouble."

The Rio Kid settled back in his saddle, face tight, the blood still trickling down from his cut lips. His voice grew cold, filled with cutting disgust.

"Always somebody else to do the job, Stuart."

"Give him a gun!" Doc cut in. "I'll face him here and now."

"No," Stuart snapped. "I want no blame put on us for his death. Doc, take him out to the Apaches. Take a couple of the boys with yuh and get back here as quick as yuh can."

Doc cursed softly but earnestly, then named two of the men to follow him. In a few moments the little party in charge of Holliday rode away from Globe, the Rio Kid in their midst.

They rode for several hours before Doc Holliday called a halt and made camp, waiting for daylight. Not once did Doc speak to the Rio Kid.

Morning found them on the trail again, heading directly for the San Carlos Reservation. Now Doc alertly watched for Indian sign. As they penetrated deeper into the broken country, beyond the radius of the roads and trails leading out of Globe, the Rio Kid knew that his chances for rescue were now decidedly slim. Only his own

[*Turn page*]

CAN YOUR SCALP PASS THE
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1 "It's F-N, the test for men!" Scratch your head—if you find dryness or loose dandruff you need Wildroot Cream-Oil. Buy the large economy size.
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3 Get Wildroot Cream-Oil from your barber or drug counter.
AND TUNE IN... "The Adventures of Sam Spade" on CBS Network every Sunday.
WILDROOT CREAM-OIL
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efforts would free him.

Just after noon, the little party climbed a steep slope, heading toward a ragged line of boulders on the crest. Without warning, an Apache appeared against the skyline, carbine nestled in his arms. He called a guttural hail down to the party. Other Indians appeared and surrounded the little cavalcade as it rode into the camp below the far side of the ridge. A sub-chief stepped up to Doc Holliday's stirrup, glittering eyes sweeping over the Rio Kid.

"How," he said to Doc Holliday. "It is good to see Eyes-Like-A-Rock again. . . ."

THE same morning, John Clum rode into Globe after a long, pushing trip from the Agency at San Carlos. He was grim and worried. He rode on through the town and out to the camp, where General Miles instantly received him.

"Is San Carlos straightened up?" Miles asked.

Clum made a slight gesture with his hand.

"In regards to the Agency, yes. But I can't get a line on the arms smuggled to the Indians."

"That's the whole nub of the problem," General Miles snapped. At once his voice grew harsh. "But I can't exactly blame that on your men, John. What are you doing about it?"

"I have a man with the Indians at San Carlos—Darrell Duppa. I have Captain Pryor working for me at Globe. I can't hear from either of them. Duppa might not be able to send word, but I should have heard from the Rio Kid."

"He's busy enough," Miles said.

He briefly outlined what he knew of the Rio Kid's activities, touching on the Mid-Arizona, Red Stuart, the mysterious man behind Stuart, and the total lack of proof against any of them. Clum listened with growing excitement.

"I knew Pryor would turn up something!" he explained. "Proof? It's a matter of time only. I'll look him up in Globe right away."

Clum returned to Globe and inquired for the Rio Kid at the hotel. He was told that he would probably find his man at the Heaton place and, despite his weariness, Clum asked his way to the little cottage. His knock brought Rae Heaton to the door. She called Celestino.

"But he ees at the hotel!" Celestino exclaimed.

"He's not, and hasn't been there." Clum shook his head.

Celestino stared at the Indian agent, and slowly his eyes darkened and his face became grim.

"There ees something happen, Senor Clum. *Por Dios*, I find heem out!"

He rushed back in the house, grabbing up his sombrero and gun-belt. As he buckled it around his waist he sputtered curses and orders.

Buck called from his bedroom and Rae explained what little she knew. Celestino rushed into the front room where Clum sat wearily on the horsehair divan.

"Senor Clum, I look for *mi* General. You stay here, eh? So maybe I need you, I can find queeck."

"I'll be here. If not, you'll find me at the hotel."

Celestino left the house, rushed to the hotel, and up to his room. A single glance at the bed and around the room told him that the Rio Kid had not been there. Celestino wheeled and rushed out to the street. He slowed, thoughtful, scowling, and then turned determinedly toward the Mid-Arizona office.

"Mr. Stuart's not here," the clerk answered Celestino's question. His hand dropped below the counter and Celestino smiled.

"Senor," the Mexican said, "as I feel now I hope you pull thees gun from under there. I would be mos' happee to shoot."

The clerk hastily jerked his hand away and gulped.

"Stuart's not here," he repeated. "Won't be in this morning."

"Senor Holliday?"

"I haven't seen him. I don't know."

Celestino studied the man's face and decided he was telling the truth and knew nothing of the latest development. The young Mexican turned and left the office. He headed back toward the Heaton place, intending to report to John Clum and ask for his help.

A short distance from the house, a man stood by a thick clump of bushes, staring down at the ground as though searching for something. He looked up and scratched his head. His eyes lighted when Celestino came hurrying along.

"Hey, hombre," he called. "Did yuh hear any fracas last night?"

"No, senor," Celestino snapped, and walked on.

He stopped abruptly as the meaning of the question penetrated the veil of worry. He turned back.

"What ees thees fracas, eh?" he demanded.

"Look," the man pointed to the ground. "There was a heap of men here last night. I live here abouts, and last night I thought I heard talk and whispers. I was more than half asleep, I reckon, and never quite woke up. But that dream, as I figgered it to be, was so real it worried me. I come out here to make shore. Wasn't dreamin'."

The marks of the lurking men showed clearly in the soft loam around the bushes. Celestino's eyes narrowed as he read the sign. He moved down the line of bushes to the alley, and there lost the trail. But the implications were plain, and he would have bet his life on what had happened.

WITHOUT a further word, he turned and hurried to the Heaton home. Clum was asleep in his chair in the front room and Celestino shook him awake. Rae stood in the doorway, listening, as the young Mexican told what he had learned. Clum picked up his hat.

"Stuart and Holliday missing, and all the rest adds up!" he exclaimed. "I guess we'd better see General Miles."

"But *mi* General ees in Globe!" Celestino remonstrated.

Clum shook his head.

"No, I don't think Stuart would run that risk. He's taken Pryor out onto the range somewhere so there won't be any proof against him. The cavalry may find him, and I only hope he isn't found too late."

Celestino said nothing more, even after he and Clum had hurried to the livery stable, saddled their horses, and ridden off to the camp. But his dark eyes searched the crowd. If he saw Red Stuart or Doc Holliday, the young Mexican vowed to kill either or both of them on the spot. . . .

In the meantime, Doc Holliday had led his prisoner down into the camp, the Apaches trailing on either side. Once the cadaverous dentist looked sharply at the Rio Kid and his thin lips quirked, but he said nothing.

The sub-chief made his visitors welcome and stared hard at the Rio Kid. His glittering eyes suggested unspeakable tortures.

"Walik," Holliday said to him, "I got a present for yuh. This is the Rio Kid, and he ain't no friend to the Apaches. He works for the white general."

Walik grunted, and his eyes narrowed. He touched the hilt of the knife in his breech clout.

"Can see if he is a man?" he asked, in halting English.

"Now that's the idea," Holliday said.

He dismounted and cut the rope that bound the Rio Kid.

"No use tyin' yuh no more," he told Pryor. "I reckon yuh won't get away from these jaspers."

The Rio Kid stiffly dismounted. Walik raised his carbine.

"Eyes-Like-A-Rock, when will we have more? Apache lose some, need plenty bullet, but Apache do what Eyes-Like-A-Rock ask."

"Another mine?" asked Holliday.

"Another. Use plenty bullet, need more. Use plenty firewater. Need more."

"Yuh'll get it," Holliday agreed, "but first Walik must do somethin' for Eyes-Like-A-Rock. I want this hombre planted and I don't care much how yuh do the job. Second, I want yuh to raid the Heaton and Nolan ranches, burn 'em down."

Walik grunted some swift words to his men in his own tongue, and three of them advanced on the Rio Kid, knives in their fists. He knew the uselessness of resistance, yet he couldn't go down without a fight. As one of the Indians came close, the Rio Kid's fist lashed out. He sent the Indian tumbling. He wheeled, slammed into one of the renegades, grabbing for his six.

The Rio Kid had the gun out of leather before the man knew what had happened. Both of them went down in a wild tangle. Walik yelled, and the Indians jumped in, throwing themselves bodily upon the Rio Kid. For a time, the pile heaved and struggled. The gun blasted, muffled, and an Indian rolled limply out of the mêlée.

Another Apache fell, blood streaming from a knife wound in his chest. The Rio Kid lashed out with the gun-barrel, cracking heads as fast as he could.

A brawny hand grabbed his gun wrist. Another Indian bored in, eyes glittering above the band of paint that covered his face. He held a Colt, and the Rio Kid knew that the end was not far off.

The Apache's six lifted, lined.

The gun blasted and roared, but the slug buried itself in the brawny chest of the Indian who was trying to wrench the gun from the Rio Kid. The second Apache wheeled like a striking snake, the smoking

six still in his hand. He lined the sights on Doc Holliday.

"Call them off, old man," the Apache said, in perfectly good English.

He caught Doc Holliday off guard and his speech so stunned the man that Holliday could only stare, with mouth agape. The painted face tightened and Holliday recognized the grim determination in the dark eyes.

He yelled orders, and the Apaches fell back from the Rio Kid. The Apache didn't move his eyes from Holliday, but spoke from the corner of his mouth.

"Get their guns, Pryor. The Indians', too."

"Duppa!" the Rio Kid panted.

Abruptly his gun wrist flicked and his six blasted, bucking back in his hand. A renegade who had tried a sneak play spun half-around and fell in a limp heap. Duppa's eyes didn't waver from Doc Holliday.

"That was quick, Pryor," he said, "and puts me in your debt. Get their guns."

The Rio Kid picked up another six and leveled both guns on the bunched Indians and renegade whites.

"You know the camp better than I do, Duppa," he said grimly, "and yuh can gather up the weapons faster. I'll hold this bunch."

CHAPTER XVIII

Showdown

NOT for an instant did Duppa hesitate. He moved around the Rio Kid so as not to interfere with his guns, and strode off to the bare little camp. The white and red men standing before the Rio Kid strained forward but made no other move, for his guns were too steady, and both hammers were dogged back under his thumbs. He smiled coldly.

"Doc," he drawled, "the first slug is yores. Nobody can stop that. If yore red playmates get too anxious, yuh won't live to take another breath. Better tell 'em."

Doc spoke evenly, in fair Spanish. Walik listened, nodded, and translated into the guttural Apache tongue. The warriors made no answer, but the Rio Kid saw the tension leave them.

He heard the sound of metal on rock, repeated several times from the camp. At last Duppa came back, leading a couple of horses. Carbines were in saddle-boots, and Duppa had sixes stuck into the band of his breech clout. He smiled at the Rio Kid.

"I've broken the rifle breeches, thrown the guns away, and untied their horses," he said. "D'ye think you could hold them a moment longer while I mount for the fox hunt that's coming?"

"I can hold 'em," the Rio Kid said. He frowned at the two horses. "But I want to take Holliday along."

"Can't do it, y'know." Duppa shook his head. "Our red brothers will be fast enough in pursuit, and the good Holliday would do all he could to hold us back. Sorry."

The Rio Kid saw the wisdom of Duppa's words. He waited until Duppa was mounted and covering the men from horseback. Then the Rio Kid holstered his guns and vaulted into his own saddle. He gave Doc Holliday a regretful look and, at Duppa's slight nod, touched with his blunted spurs.

Both animals rocketed away. Instantly angry howls sounded from the Apaches, and Holliday's six cracked spitefully. Slugs whined close to the Rio Kid but he crouched low over the horse, his spurs along its flanks urging the mount on. In a moment even Holliday's slugs were ineffective.

Duppa led the way, heading directly for distant Globe. The Rio Kid knew that the Apaches would be boiling after them, taking short cuts that probably even Duppa didn't know. For the first two or three miles the race would be nip and tuck, for a running Apache was still a man to be reckoned with.

The ground fairly blurred by and Duppa took some sudden turnings to throw the Apache racers off the trail. For several miles the two men raced along, and at last Duppa pulled up his horse. He halted the animal to let it blow, twisted around, and smiled at the Rio Kid. He looked far from the aristocratic Englishman, last of a long and noble line.

"I think our friends will have trouble catching up with us now," he said. "We can reach Globe without killing our horses."

"Duppa," the Rio Kid said soberly, "twice yuh've pulled me out of a tight spot. Yuh have my thanks for it."

"Glad to be of service, old man. I dare say you would have done the same for me." Duppa settled deeper in saddle and frowned

up toward the crest of the ridges. "Y'know, I'm finished with the Apaches, and I'm glad of it. It's a filthy, savage life. I shall bathe continuously for a month when I reach Globe."

"So Holliday is Eyes-Like-A-Rock," the Rio Kid said musingly. "That's the news I've been wantin' to hear, though I did suspect it."

"I can add to it," Duppa said, "but we'd better be on our way. No need to let Walik and his lovely lads catch up with us."

They headed toward Globe at a fast trot. Though Duppa had said they were safe from pursuit, they took no chances. They made several detours and constantly searched their back trail, cautiously approaching spots that would make excellent ambushes.

At last they saw the gleam of tents, and not long after a sentry bawled a sharp challenge, carbine centered on Duppa's bronze chest. The Rio Kid gave his name and asked to see General Miles. The trooper eyed Duppa with deep suspicion, and didn't let his carbine waver as he called the corporal of the guard.

The Rio Kid was instantly recognized and the two men were led toward the General's tent, though Duppa was watched like a hawk. He was an Apache to the troopers, and they were taking no chances. There was a short delay, but at last the two men were admitted. The orderly remained just inside the entrance, one hand resting lightly on his holstered Colt. Miles stared at the Apache, and the Rio Kid laughed.

"General, I want yuh to meet a fine English gentleman. Beneath that paint and dirt is Mr. Darrell Duppa, John Clum's undercover man up at San Carlos. We got some definite news for yuh."

GENERAL MILES shook hands with Duppa and, despite himself, the officer could not keep from staring at the savage figure. Duppa did not seem to mind. Miles waved the orderly outside the tent, then sank down in his chair beside the field desk.

"The gent who has been stirring up the Indians at the San Carlos Reservation is one called Eyes-Like-A-Rock," the Rio Kid said, as he came directly to the point. "I was captured the other night and taken out of Globe by that hombre."

"My men are searching for you." Miles nodded. "John Clum and Senor Mireles were here with the news."

"Depend on Celestino." The Rio Kid smiled, but instantly his face darkened. "I heard an Apache sub-chief call this white man by his Indian name. He is Doc Holliday, who takes orders from Red Stuart and the Mid-Arizona."

Miles hand balled into a fist. "I've been waiting for this, Pryor, and hoping you'd identify the scoundrel. How did he get the guns to the Indians?"

"He didn't, y'know," Duppa cut in. "Holliday did the talking, working the Apaches up, telling them they were not men to sit around a reservation. He would talk about Geronimo and the past glory of the Apaches, and call them old women because they no longer took the war-path."

"That's bad enough," Miles said, "but the Indians did have carbines and the loads to go with them."

"Righto," Duppa agreed. "But there is a band of gunslammers headed by Cholla Reagan. They bring the contraband close to San Carlos, to a designated spot and camp. The Indian bands slip out and meet them. As big as San Carlos is, that's easily enough done. Reagan gave them firewater. When they were howling madmen from it, he would pass around the rifles and ammunition, and suggest a place for them to raid."

"You can prove this?" Miles asked.

Duppa shrugged.

"I've been living as an Apache at San Carlos for months," the Englishman explained. "I've pretended to hate the white man and even dropped hints that I was a good friend to Geronimo. Even so, they were suspicious brutes and I had begun to believe I might as well have stayed in Tucson. Then, at last, they began to trust me. I have been with some of the bands that slipped out to meet Reagan."

"Good!" Miles' fist hit his desk.

Duppa made a wry face, and the war paint made it look like a devil's grimace.

"I was forced to go on a raid with them," he said. "We hit the Midas Mine. Luckily, none of my Apache friends noticed that I fired only into the air. That was a most unpleasant business."

"Now it's clear," the Rio Kid cut in, "just as I figgered it. Mid-Arizona deliberately forced down the price of copper claims by stirrin' up the Injuns and sendin' 'em on the warpath. Ranchers got scared and left their spreads, or sold them out so cheap that Red Stuart could snap 'em up. Other minin' com-

panies lost their equipment and their workers till they got desperate. They had to save somethin', and the Mid-Arizona was there to buy. Stuart used the Apache menace to scare ranchers into sellin' to him, since no other company was in the market for mineral rights."

"I'd like proof of that, too," General Miles said. "Not that we haven't enough, but that would clinch the whole case. Red Stuart will be the hard one to pin down. He'll claim he knew nothing about the activities of Holliday and Reagan."

"I've got the proof," the Rio Kid said. "Monte Carlson carried a paper with my room number written on it. I can match them figgers with another set and unmask the man behind Red Stuart. Rae Heaton will tell yuh how Stuart tried to scare her into sellin' her spread. She'll prove that Stuart knew of the Apache trouble, that Holliday was behind it. Doc was with Stuart at the time he tried to use the Apaches as a cudgel over Rae Heaton."

Miles stood up and slammed his hat on his head.

"That's enough. I want you gentlemen along when I make these arrests."

"I'm hardly presentable," Duppa drawled.

Miles smiled coldly. "I don't think Stuart or Holliday will mind. They're quite used to Apaches, it seems. Our prisoners are waiting, gentlemen. Let's go get them."

Miles called the orderly, spoke briefly and precisely. The soldier saluted and left the tent in a hurry. The Rio Kid snugged his guns to a better position in their holsters. Duppa watched him, then turned pleadingly to Miles.

"General, I feel that I should be minus the war paint and be wearing a pair of trousers, at least. Globe might not be in a welcoming mood to a disguised Apache. You might also see if there isn't a gun-belt and holster in the camp."

Miles frowned impatiently, but quickly smiled.

"You have a point, Mr. Duppa," he agreed. "We'll wait for your change."

A DETAIL of four troopers and a sergeant were waiting outside the tent when Duppa at last emerged, at least partially civilized. His shirt was a little large and he wore Apache high moccasins under baggy trousers legs. But the gun-belt and holster around his waist looked efficient enough, and the broad bands of paint were gone from his face.

Miles instantly swung into saddle and, with a brief signal, started at a fast trot toward Globe. The Rio Kid felt excitement mount. It was always this way just before he reached the successful conclusion of a case.

They entered Globe and the Rio Kid drew abreast of General Miles.

"Let's get the real head of the gang first, General," he suggested. "I'll lead the way."

Miles nodded and swung into a side street. They turned another corner and the Rio Kid drew rein before a quiet residence. Miles' eyes bugged from his head and his jaws dropped open. He swallowed, hard, and tried to get his voice.

The Rio Kid had already dismounted, and he raced for the front door, Duppa at his heels. Without ceremony, the Rio Kid tested the knob, found the door locked. He took a step back and his brawny shoulder struck the panel, snapped the lock. He stepped inside, both guns ready in his hands. The house was empty.

Miles appeared in the doorway. The Rio Kid bent over the desk in the front room, quickly pulling out drawers and examining their contents.

Miles checked him.

"Have you lost your head, Pryor?"

"No." The Rio Kid touched a neat row of figures on a sheet of paper, each with a strange curlicue. "These check with the paper Monte Carlson carried when he tried to bushwhack me."

"Pryor," Duppa said quietly from the bedroom door, "here's what you've been wanting."

He held out a heavy ledger. Miles, the Rio Kid, and Duppa went through several of its pages. Here was the secret record of the Mid-Arizona, here was "John Smith's" private account of the activities of the company, and of Red Stuart.

The General picked up the book, face dark with anger.

"You've convinced me," he said soberly. "No wonder we were all running around in circles. Who'd suspect the man at the head of the Mining Association? Breck Long played a deep and crooked game."

"He may be down at the Mid-Arizona offices," the Rio Kid said hastily. "We'd better get there before he finds out we raided his house. He'll escape yet, if we're not mighty careful!"

CHAPTER XIX

Gunsmoke Ending

MILES gave the order, and the men ran outside and remounted. The general sent a soldier back to the camp with the ledger while he led the way to the center of town and the small row of mining companies buildings.

The Rio Kid saw a lathered, blown horse standing with hanging head at the hitch-rack before the Mid-Arizona office. While still some distance away, he saw a man come out of the office, check himself swiftly, and wheel back inside. The Rio Kid spurred forward beyond General Miles.

"That was Doc!" he yelled. "They'll be gettin' away!"

Miles snapped an order and the little knot of horsemen thundered down the street. As they came to a sliding halt, Red Stuart came out of the office. He saw them and his jaw dropped in stunned surprise. Cholla Reagan stood just inside the doorway and, beyond him, stood Breck Long.

Stuart faded back, clawing for his six. He plunged inside the door and slammed it shut as the Rio Kid's slug splintered the panel. Miles sent troopers around the side of the building to cut off escape from the rear. The other men lunged against the door. It held, and a renegade bullet slapped through the wood, just missing the sergeant. Miles called the men back.

"You've got a chance to surrender, Long!" he called. "Are you giving up peacefully, or do we come in after you?"

There was no answer, though the Rio Kid heard muffled voices inside, raised in argument.

The minutes dragged by. Suddenly gunshots sounded from the rear of the building. The Rio Kid turned and sped the length of the building, crouching to avoid the single window that opened in the long expanse of blank wall. He stopped at the far corner and called to the troopers.

"They tried leavin'," one yelled, "and we plumb discouraged 'em!"

"Anybody hurt?" called the Rio Kid.

"Neither of us, but one of them jaybirds ain't feelin' too comfortable in there."

The Rio Kid returned to the single window and raised his head cautiously to the level of the glass. A blind kept him from looking in. He heard Miles' voice calling again for surrender. The general received a savage burst of gunfire as an answer, but it only shredded the door panel.

The Rio Kid used his Colt barrel on the window glass, covering the sound during the next burst of firing. He crouched low when the glass shattered, but no shots challenged him.

It was a risky business. The Rio Kid knew that besides Cholla, Stuart, Doc and Breck Long, all four dangerous men, there were possibly some of Reagan's renegade gunslammers inside. But if he could slip in this way, he might save the lives of good soldiers storming the front door.

The Rio Kid reached cautiously through the broken glass and snapped up the blind. Nothing happened, and he saw that this window opened on a little used and dusty storeroom. The far door was closed.

Instantly the Rio Kid pulled himself up over the sill and dropped inside, making little noise, and that covered by the crack of carbines from the front. The Rio Kid catfooted to the far door and cautiously tested the knob. It turned, and the door opened a crack. He could plainly hear Red Stuart's pleading voice.

"Don't be a cussed fool, Cholla! Yuh can't hope to hold 'em off. We'll all be killed!"

"I'd rather be killed by a six than hung," came Cholla's rasped answer. "You know I can't stand a trial. It'll bring some killin' I done for yuh to light and they'll stretch my neck. Why don't yuh run out like Doc Holliday done? He saw these jaspers comin', walked through to the back as cool as yuh pleased, and left us to hold the sack. He's ten miles from Globe by now."

A six exploded loudly and the Rio Kid tensed as he pushed the door open a little farther. He pulled his Colts smoothly from leather and thumbed back the hammers.

"Yuh won't hang, Reagan," Stuart said desperately. "There's too much dinero behind us."

"Is there?" Breck Long's cold voice cut in. "I'm your dinero, Stuart, and I'm caught flat with the rest of you. You've done exactly what I warned you against. The Rio Kid's out there."

"He can't prove nothin'!" Stuart said.

"I disagree. I've checked his past record and that man makes no move unless he's certain of his ground. No, Stuart, Pryor's got the whole story by now. You've bungled."

"Yuh've got money!" Stuart said, his voice raising a little. "Yuh know judges."

"This is a Federal charge," Cholla cut in. "A heap of good money does now!"

"Besides, you'll talk, Stuart," Breck said evenly. "You'll try to save your own hide in the court, and you'll drag us all into it. I warned you not to implicate me."

"They got it to prove!" Stuart pleaded. Suddenly his voice rose sharply. "No, yuh don't!"

"Watch out, Long!" Cholla roared.

THE Rio Kid heard bodies crash together. A six exploded and someone screamed. Instantly the Rio Kid's shoulder hit the door, smashing it back. Breck Long stood with a smoking Colt in his hand, Cholla Reagan at his side. Stuart had fallen against the wall, a red stain on his shirt front, eyes bugged in horror. Two rat-faced gunhawks crouched by the barricaded door and the pale clerk huddled, shivering, in a far corner.

Cholla wheeled, glimpsed the Rio Kid. Long and the two gunhawks saw him at the same moment. Four guns swept toward the Rio Kid, spitting flame and death. The Rio Kid dropped hammers and his own Colts bucked back against his palms. He fired, weaving from side to side, moving to throw off accurate shooting.

One gunhawk went down. Powdersmoke filled the room, lanced by flashes of flame. A second man spun half-around and tumbled in a heap. Reagan and Long came charging forward through the smoke, guns spitting. The Rio Kid crouched back against the wall. His slug caught Breck Long between the eyes and the man crashed down, gun flying from his lifeless fingers.

Reagan came on, a bulky, deadly figure, gun spitting. A hot brand seared across the Rio Kid's arm, high up toward the shoulder. Wood splinters flew from the wall behind him. Narrow-eyed, crouched, the Rio Kid centered his sixes, and once more dropped the hammers.

Cholla came up high on his toes, his back arching, head flung back. He seemed to throw his six away and claw toward the ceiling. He fell with a crash, bootheels rapping on the floor.

The barricaded door splintered and crashed back, and troopers tumbled inside. The Rio Kid holstered his sixes, took a step toward Stuart. Celestino flung himself at his General. The young Mexican could not control his excitement and joy. He shouted in Spanish, laughed, and pounded the Rio Kid on the back.

Miles called the Rio Kid. The officer leaned over Red Stuart, whose face was a sickly gray. The Rio Kid bent over the manager of the Mid-Arizona.

"Yuh won all the chips," Stuart said thickly. "Breck Long ordered yuh killed—and Doc wanted to do it. I should have let him. The others—bungled—like I did."

His eyes closed and his breathing grew more shallow. Then his lids snapped open and he stared hard at the Rio Kid.

"Mistake," he muttered. "And I ain't goin' to be—around—to straighten—"

His body arched high, then slumped. General Miles arose and dusted his hands.

"Gone for good," he said. "We'd better get this mess cleaned up. . . ."

Late that night, the Rio Kid and Celestino sat across Rae Heaton's table from John Clum and Darrell Duppa. The Indian Agent smiled and rubbed his hands.

"It's all over, Rio Kid," he chuckled. "You clinched the proof against Breck Long, and he's dead. I made a sad mistake when I told him you were coming. As manager of Western and head of the association, who would have suspected him?"

"I didn't—at first," the Rio Kid said ruefully. "In fact, I talked over my problem with him once, and told Long exactly what he wanted to know about our plans."

Clum shook his head.

"I wanted the Mining Association to know the Indian Agency was trying to check the Apaches, so I told Long about you," Clum explained. "He had Stuart, Holliday and the gunhawks waiting, even before you reached Tucson. But that's all over. Stuart's dead, and so is Cholla. Holliday's fled, and Mid-Arizona stands under a Federal indictment. That means every rancher and mining company can bring suit against it for recovery of land and property obtained under false pretenses. How long do you think Mid-Arizona will last?"

"Not long now."

Rae came out of the bedroom, her face glowing. The men were held by her beauty, and the glow that made her face almost angelic. She smiled at them and flushed a little.

"Buck has asked me to announce something for him," she said. "We will be married—in the morning."

HASTILY the men arose, smiling, congratulating her. They trooped into Buck's bedroom and joked with him until Rae chased them out. Then they left, heading toward Broad Street.

When they turned a corner, they pulled up short. A huge crowd stood before the hotel. Clum stopped a man who hurried by.

"What's going on?" he demanded.

"They're askin' for the gent named the Rio Kid," the man explained. "Globe wants to thank him personal and in public for breakin' up the renegades that was armin' them Apaches. I reckon every man there has lost somethin', and they're all thankful for a chance to get it back from that Mid-Arizona outfit. I got to hurry, mister. I want a look at this Rio Kid."

He jerked away from Clum and rushed toward the crowd. Clum turned and smiled at the Rio Kid. He waved his arm toward the hotel.

"Better get up there and take their thanks. It certainly belongs to you."

"Not me," the Rio Kid said. "Celestino, reckon we could saddle up Saber and yore gray without that bunch knowin' it?"

"*Si*, General. Where we go, eh?"

"Who cares? I reckon there's some other town or range that's in a tight. I never heard renegades all stayed in one place. Let's head out."

Clum shook his hand and chuckled a farewell. The Rio Kid and Celestino ducked into a dark areaway between two buildings. Darrell Duppa came running after them.

"I'll ride with you as far as Tucson," he said. "D'ye know, I'm most eager to see a big town again. Civilization, old man—I'm badly in need of it."

"Glad to have yuh, Duppa. Yuh're a man to ride with. Let's go."

Not long afterward three horsemen rode southward out of Globe, avoiding the main street. At the edge of town they turned and looked back at the crowd that still congregated before the hotel.

The Rio Kid removed his Stetson and sighed deeply.

"Shore glad we missed 'em. Folks make such a heap to do over nothin'."

"Depends on how you look at it," Duppa said, and laughed. He picked up the reins. "*Vamose*, eh?"

"*Vamose*" Celestino ecohed, and smiled.

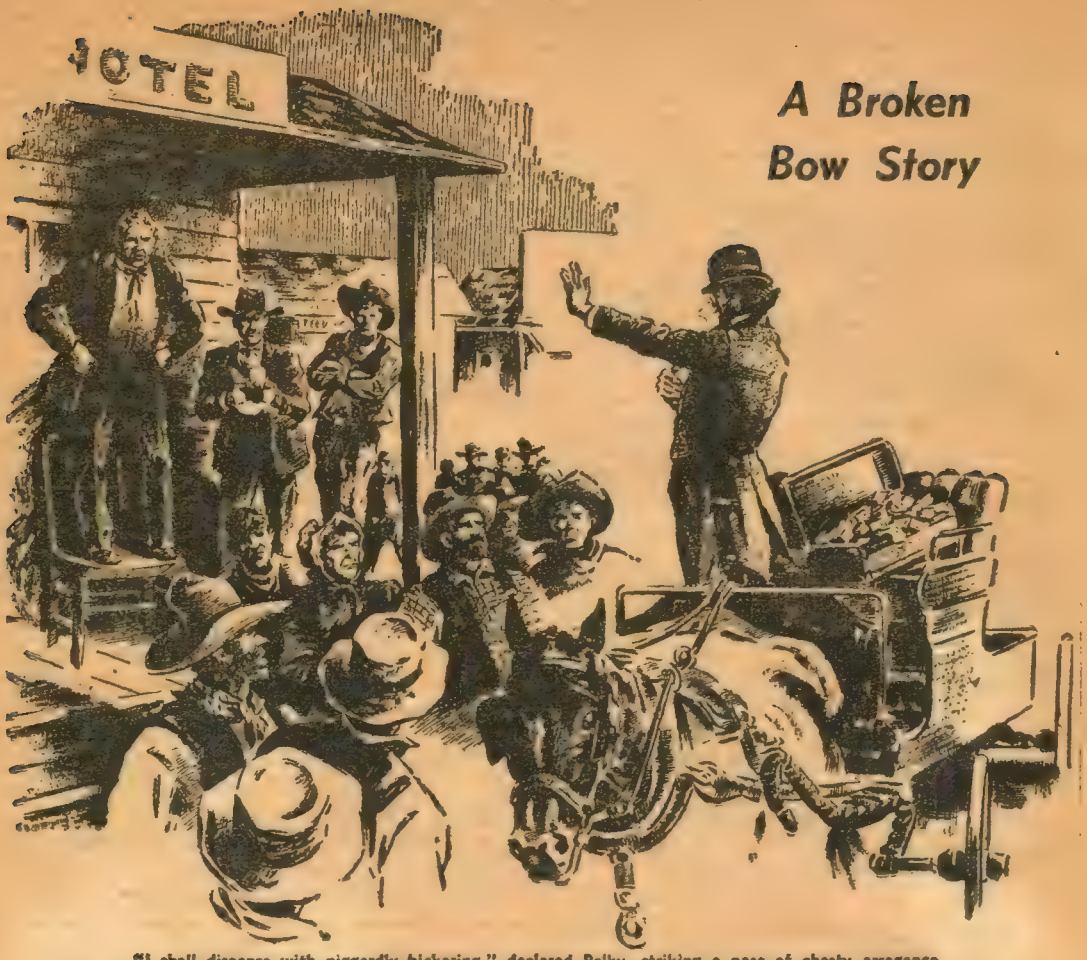
The three men rode away into the night, Saber's ears twitching back toward Globe. Another chapter had ended and there could be no guessing what adventures the morrow would bring.

"I'm Arrestin' Yuh, Bannock Jake—and If Yore Pals Try to Stop Me, They're Dead Men!"

IT TOOK cold nerve for Bob Pryor to talk that way when he and his pards were vastly outnumbered. On his side—Editor Reynolds, Celestino, Al Sieber, and Lew Mills. On his foeman's side—a score of gunnies who were ready to fight to the death to further their chieftain's evil dream of empire. But—so forceful were the Rio Kid's words, so menacing the muzzle of his gun, backed by the firm purpose in his eyes, that the henchmen of Bannock Jake edged away, cowed and fearful.

The Rio Kid grinned. He had won—but he knew it was only a temporary victory over the sinister marauders who wage a terrible fight against the progress of the range in IDAHO RAIDERS, next issue's smash-packed complete Rio Kid novel by Tom Curry.

You'll meet great pioneers of the West in IDAHO RAIDERS—and you'll thrill to their deeds of daring. You'll also find Bob Pryor and Celestino at their fighting best—facing some of the most formidable foes in their careers. Look forward to IDAHO RAIDERS. It's a humdinger of a yarn packed with action, excitement and stirring adventure!



"I shall dispense with niggardly bickering," declared Pelky, striking a pose of chesty arrogance

A Broken Bow Story

COMICAL AS A CLOWN

By L. ERNENWEIN

Close-shave Pelky switches from barbering to acting when crooked promoters scheme to give his compadres a trimming!

"CLOSE-SHAVE" PELKY was scanning the Tombstone *Epitaph's* front page when two fashionably garbed strangers entered his barbershop in Broken Bow shortly after noon. In addition to being the town's only barber, Close-Shave was a frustrated variety actor and the laziest man in Arizona Territory at this particular time.

The frustration was due to his having married a high-minded woman who considered stage-acting a piddling profession devoid of dignity and economic security. His lack of barbering ambition was a result of monopoly. If a man wanted tonsorial attention in Broken Bow he had to get it at Close-Shave's shop or go without.

Toil at any time was distasteful to Pelky, but during the heat of the day it was down-

right repugnant to him. So when the taller of the two strangers announced, "I'll have a shave," Pelky paid him no heed. And when the short, hog-jowled gentleman demanded, "Are you deaf?" Close-Shave had a brilliant inspiration.

At least it seemed so to him at the time. Here, he thought happily, was a magnificent opportunity to practise the profession his wife had badgered him into forsaking. These two dudes probably had got off the noon stage. They wouldn't know he was running a sandy on them if he made out that he was deaf and dumb.

Ignoring the pair of customers, Pelky turned to a story about the new railroad which was being built west from Lordsburg. The headline said:

NO BOOM FOR BROKEN BOW

Beneath it the story read:

According to Sylvester Smith and Johnathan Brown, officials of Arizona-Western, the new railroad will not lay its tracks through Broken Bow but will cross Dragoon Basin by way of Shirt Tail Flats and Soda Water Spring, some thirty miles north of the route originally planned.

The two railroad officials spent Monday in our fair metropolis, sampling the hospitality of the Crystal Palace Saloon and attending an evening performance at the Bird Cage Theatre. Upon making their departure, Messrs. Smith and Brown expressed high praise for Tombstone and bemoaned the fact that the big construction camp which they plan to erect on Shirt Tail Flats will be so far removed from this desert oasis.

Close-Shave sighed with genuine relief. For weeks he had dreaded the boom in business which had seemed destined to come when the railroad reached Broken Bow. He had flinched inwardly at the thought of shaggy-maned men crowding his barbershop from morn till night, wanting haircuts.

One of the strangers—the short, beefy-cheeked one, stepped over to Pelky and pushed the paper aside.

"Are you deaf?" he demanded.

CLOSE-SHAVE blinked up at him as if startled, as if aware for the first time that there were customers awaiting service. This, he thought fleetingly, was his chance to convince himself that time hadn't tarnished his histrionic talent, that his rightful place was on a stage entertaining appreciative audiences instead of standing behind a barber-chair shearing the snarled locks of unschooled cowhands.

Smiling apologetically, Close-Shave pointed to an ear and sadly shook his head. Even his usually twinkling blue eyes took on a blank expression when he glanced at the tall man in his barber-chair and made a scissor-like gesture. The man shook his head, whereupon Pelky ran a finger down his own cheek. As the fellow nodded, Close-Shave smiled cheerfully.

"This galoot," the tall man said to his companion, "isn't just deaf, Greg. He's deaf and dumb."

Close-Shave Pelky felt as proud as seven peacocks. Exaltation flared high in him as he lathered his customer's hawk-featured face. This proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that he had not lost his fine flair for acting. He had successfully accomplished the difficult art of pantomime, hadn't he? And pantomime was the very epitome of theatrical performance!

For a time then, while beefy-cheeked Greg scanned the newspaper, the scrape of Pelky's razor was the only sound in the barbershop. And because Close-Shave's wife Abigail had consistently scoffed at his hope of one day returning to the stage, the bald-headed barber could scarcely wait to tell her about his success in the realm of histrionic endeavor.

For this was a success in every sense of the word—a real achievement. These two men were not gullible cowboys or ignorant sheep-herders who would be taken in by an amateurish performance. Judging by their stylish garb they were big city men—a sharp and sensitive audience. And he had convinced them that he was deaf and dumb, by godfreys!

"From what the hotel proprietor said, business should be rushing at two o'clock, Shad," Greg reflected smilingly.

"Not so loud!" the lathered man warned. "He's stone deaf, isn't he? What you worrying about?"

"But somebody outside might hear you."

That didn't make sense to Close-Shave Pelky. Nor did their vague, low-voiced references to real estate. A couple of traveling salesmen, he guessed.

When both men had received Pelky's tonsorial attention, tall, hawk-faced Shad shouted:

"How much do we owe you?"

Close-Shave was momentarily embarrassed, baffled as to how he could tell them the amount of their indebtedness without re-

vealing his ability to talk. For a hushed moment, while perspiration greased the bald dome of his head, Pelky stood stumped and chagrined. Then, recalling that this part depended on pantomime at its finest, he held up the knobby fingers and thumb of his left hand and fashioned a zero with his right.

Whereupon Shad handed him fifty cents and followed his hog-jowled partner out to the sidewalk.

Doc Plunkett, better known as "Parable" Plunkett because of his habitual spouting of fancy phrases, came into the barbershop. A dismal frown creased his age-mottled face as he hung his battered stove-pipe hat and shabby Prince Albert coat upon a hook.

"This is a sad day for Broken Bow," he lamented, and eased back in the barber chair with a long-drawn sigh.

"What's so sad about it?" Pelky asked. "Haven't you read the *Epitaph?*"

Close-Shave nodded, and lathered the old medico's face.

"Having the railroad go to Shirt Tail Flats instead of coming here doesn't hurt my feelings, Doc," he said. "There's enough barber business in Broken Bow right now to suit me."

"Of course," Plunkett said. "But there won't be if two-thirds of this town's population moves to Shirt Tail Flats, and that's exactly what will happen. Instead of being satisfied with a peaceful and leisurely way of life they are bemoaning the ghastly prank of frivolous fate which has caused the railroad to change its original plans. They are smitten with the bitter anguish of frustration and regret because our fair city is being shunned by the tremendous tromp of empire. It doesn't occur to them that Broken Bow's glorious traditions remain exactly as they were, that our salubrious climate and deathless heritage of untrammeled freedom are unchanged."

PELKY smiled, and industriously plied his razor. Doc, he reflected, was always making mountains out of mole hills. The old medico could sling more fancy words of wisdom on one drink of bourbon than any other man in Arizona Territory.

"Civic pride and greed for gold are this world's twin plagues of perdition," Plunkett muttered. "People are never satisfied with what they've got. Which reminds me of a fine bit of philosophy I once read, which goes something like this: 'God grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change, the courage to change things I can, and wisdom enough to know the difference.' "

"That," Close-Shave declared, "is the best I ever heard," and nodded to "Dude" Mulqueen, proprietor of the livery stable, who sauntered into the barbershop.

"It looks like this'll be a ghost-town for shore now," the little liveryman announced. "Two greenhorn pilgrims that ain't read the newspaper are offerin' to buy a lot of real estate here if enough folks will sell to make it worth while. They represent some big syndicate that buys houses on speculation. I reckon them two jiggers will have no trouble buyin' homes on Residental Avenue now that the railroad ain't comin' here."

Parable Plunkett voiced dismal agreement. "Everybody will move to Shirt Tail Flats, and Broken Bow will degenerate into a forlorn and fantastic scatteration of forsaken buildings."

Even Close-Shave Pelky began to feel a trifle worried. If such a thing came to pass there would be no one here to barber.

"Seems like somebody is sure to tell those speculators about the piece in the paper," Pelky said, endeavoring to bolster his courage.

"I already did," Dude said. "But it didn't do no good. They laughed it off as a rumor."

"Broken Bow is doomed," Parable Plunkett proclaimed, "and we, who cherish it so deeply, are doomed with it. Nothing can halt the immediate and wholesale departure of this town's citizens."

The misty wetness of unshed tears showed in Dude Mulqueen's faded eyes, for Broken Bow was the only real home town he had ever known, and he loved it dearly.

"If there was only some way to keep folks from sellin' out to them darn fool speculators," he muttered.

"Perhaps we could talk folks into not taking advantage of the real estate men," Close-Shave suggested, without much confidence. "Maybe if we threatened to tell those two greenhorns about the boom not coming here, folks would be ashamed of using such underhanded tactics."

Plunkett snorted. "Coin has no conscience," he declared, "And besides, there is nothing unethical about cheating a land shark, which is the lowest form of human existence. The only way those speculators could be stopped from buying would be for someone to outbid them. I've already tried

to talk our new banker into doing that, but the impudent Johnny-Come-Lately laughed at me."

"Folks are gatherin' at the hotel now," Dude Mulqueen reported from the doorway. "The sale is supposed to start at two o'clock, and it looks like everybody that lives on Residential Avenue is there already."

Close-Shave stepped to the stoop. He peered at the Alhambra veranda, and saw what he had feared he might see. Abigail was there and she held a legal-looking document in her right hand—the deed to their home, he was sure!

Whereupon Pelky loosed a plaintive groan. Abigail would insist on selling for whatever the speculators would pay, and moving to the new boom town, sure as shooting. Nothing he could say would stop her. She had already called him a lazy lout for not wanting to see the boom come to Broken Bow. Now he would have to move his shop to Shirt Tail Flats and barber like a beaver from dawn till dark every day.

"Dadrat it all," he groaned. "If there was only some way to outbid those speculators."

"It would take a big bundle of hundred-dollar bills to do it," Doc Plunkett muttered.

A big bundle!

Those words rang a bell in Pelky's mind, made him remember the old theatrical trunk he had stored in the back-room long ago.

"By grab!" he blurted, so gustily that Plunkett and Mulqueen stared at him.

"What's bitin' ye?" the little Irishman inquired.

"An idea," Pelky declared. "A way I can outbid those speculators!"

"How?" Parable Plunkett demanded, which was the shortest utterance he had made in fifteen years.

"Follow me," Close-Shave suggested.

HE WENT hastily into the back room and lifted the lid of his battered trunk. Inside was an assortment of wigs, beards, false noses, grease paint and various make-up paraphernalia. Beneath them was a large bundle of what appeared to be a fortune in green and gold banknotes.

"Great Jehoshaphat!" Plunkett exclaimed. "Stage money galore!"

"Enough to save Broken Bow from becoming a ghost town," Close-Shave announced, and began selecting certain articles from the trunk.

"But it's the same as counterfeit," Mulqueen objected. "If ye buy anything with that stuff ye'll have to give it back when they find out the money is no good."

"Precisely," Close-Shave agreed, "but by then the speculators will be gone yonderly."

"Ah," Doc Plunkett said, an expansive smile creasing his scholarly face. "I see the light."

The old medico gave Pelky a stately and flourishing bow.

"Permit me to apologize profusely," he pleaded. "I have long known that you were an ex-Thespian of no little talent, but I never suspected you were an intellectual giant as well. Please pardon me for not recognizing your superb mental qualities, Close-Shave."

"What in the trumped up tarnation be ye talkin' about?" Dude Mulqueen demanded, completely mystified.

Close-Shave was perspiring now like a nervous thoroughbred being saddled for a big race.

"There's no time to explain details, Dude," he said. "Have you got a good-sized valise at your livery?"

"I have, and what of it?" Dude asked.

"Then place it in a buggy, hitch a horse to the rig, and bring it around to the back door here, *muy pronto*. And don't let anyone see you doing it?"

The liveryman stared at Pelky in bug-eyed astonishment.

"Be ye daft?" he demanded.

Parable Plunkett escorted him to the doorway.

"Do as Close-Shave suggests," Doc said, "and be quick about it, Dude. Take my word as a scholar and a gentleman that you will be contributing mightily toward the survival of our fair city. . . ."

It lacked ten minutes of being two o'clock when Close-Shave Pelky drove a dusty rig down Residential Avenue and turned into Main Street. No one witnessed his passage, for every home owner had answered the clarion call of the sale being held at the Alhambra Hotel.

But if anyone had seen Pelky they would not have recognized him. A brown derby with a light tan band rested atop a head of luxuriant black hair which merged with a full beard and swirling mustache. Be-ribboned pince-nez spectacles were perched high on the bridge of his nose. The fancy front of a flower-embroidered vest showed beneath a broadcloth tailed coat which

smelled of moth balls, as did his fawn-colored California pants.

Leisurely, as befits a gentleman of worldly wealth and wisdom, Pelky drove down Main Street. Beside him on the seat was a valise filled with what appeared to be genuine currency of the realm. And inside him was a tumult of excitement that rose higher and higher as he neared the Alhambra Hotel.

This, he reflected nervously, was like standing in the wings of a stage, awaiting his cue. No one in Broken Bow had ever seen him in this make-up. He felt safe enough on that score. But his voice, he feared, might give him away, unless he mastered the difficult technique of vocal fakery with considerable adroitness.

This, he realized perspiringly, would be the grand climax of his acting career. If he negotiated it successfully, Broken Bow would be spared the ignoble fate of becoming a ghost town. But should he fail or falter, if a single person in the crowd identified him, he would be derided to his dying day. And the shame of it would doubtless expedite his demise.

No actor, Close-Shave thought, had ever faced so monstrous a test of histrionic ability, nor risked so much derision. And Abigail would lead the avalanche of scornful abuse if he were exposed.

For a moment, as he eyed the throng that overflowed the hotel veranda, Close-Shave Pelky considered turning back. Even though he shared Parable Plunkett's deep affection and that of Mulqueen for this town, he wondered if it were worth so great a risk. His stage career, abandoned because of Abigail, was his only source of soul-satisfying pride. If the mellow nostalgia of that memory were obliterated by an ignoble failure here he would no longer be the proud possessor of a cherished dream. He would be just another round-shouldered barber shrouded in the sheer monotony of manipulating a razor.

AT THIS exact moment, as Close-Shave teetered on the edge of beating a hasty retreat, the short, hog-jowled speculator mounted a chair.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he announced. "We are prepared to purchase every house on Residential Avenue—if the asking price meets with our appraisal of its worth!"

Then the man Close-Shave remembered as Greg, glanced at the paper in his hand. "First on the list," he said, "is the home of Abigail Pelky."

"Dadrat his soul," Close-Shave muttered, and hurriedly tooled the livery rig up to the hotel hitchrack.

Greg smiled down at Abigail. He inquired: "What is the price on your house, madam?"

Before she could answer, Close-Shave stood up in the rig.

"Attention please!" he called in a voice pitched to pompous loudness. "The name, ladies and gentlemen, is Alexander Arlington Strathmore, but you may address me as Alex for short. I have just completed a survey of the property on Residential Avenue and am prepared to bid upon it, with your kind permission."

A flurry of exclamations ran through the throng, and Pelky glimpsed pleased smiles of anticipation on practically all faces turned toward him except those of the two speculators. Greg and Shad stared at him as if smelling something that fouled their nostrils.

"This is a privately arranged sale!" Greg shouted angrily. "By what authority do you impose your presence here?"

For reply Close-Shave tilted up the open valise so that all might see the bundled bills. "This is my authority," he announced with a dignified flourish. "And I believe it is sufficient."

Again there was a flutter of excited talk.

"I shall dispense with niggardly bartering and bickering for individual purchases," declared Pelky, striking a pose of chesty arrogance. "If some responsible and public-spirited citizen will suggest an average price per house, I shall offer a lump sum for all the property on Residential Avenue."

He glanced at Parable Plunkett who stood on the veranda steps, slyly smiling.

"You, sir," Pelky called, "have the appearance of a prominent and respected personage. Will you kindly consult with your fellow citizens as to the average asking price they wish to place upon their homes. I do not mean to hurry you good people, but I must depart for Tucson on urgent business within the hour.'

Doc Plunkett followed his suggestion at once and, during this brief interval while Shad and Greg held whispered consultation, Close-Shave surreptitiously watched Abigail. Her face was flushed with excitement and she seemed to be arguing with Mrs. Stonecypher, a widow woman who lived next door to the Pelky domicile. Whatever

the argument was about, Close-Shave felt confident that his wife would win it. She had a habit of winning.

"They have all agreed on five hundred dollars per house, without furnishings," Doc Plunkett called within five minutes.

A high price, Pelky reflected, considering there would be no railroad boom here, and no call for houses. Yet, to his astonishment, Greg shouted:

"We will buy at that price!"

"Then I shall be forced to offer five fifty per house," Close-Shave announced.

There was a burst of cheering, and the two speculators put their heads together again.

"Come, come," Pelky prompted impatiently. "Are you through bidding, gentlemen?"

"Five fifty-five," Greg snarled angrily.

Close-Shave laughed at him.

"Have you no pride, man?" he asked. "A paltry five-dollar raise is an insult to my integrity as a liberal business man—and to these kind people assembled here. I offer six hundred per house!"

Another round of cheering.

"Six twenty-five," Greg shouted and wiped sweat from his glistening forehead.

"Seven twenty-five," Close-Shave said casually, without an instant's hesitation, and when the two scowling speculators gawked open-mouthed at this hundred-dollar raise, Pelky played a masterly stroke.

"I do not approve of fractional bids," he declared, "therefore I raise my own offer to eight hundred dollars!"

The eastbound stage from Tucson rolled into town then, but no one paid it any attention. For folks who had feared they would either have to live in a boomless town or abandon worthless real estate, were cheering lustily. Even Abigail was smiling joyously and joining in the praise for Alexander Arlington Strathmore. It was a spontaneous ovation.

CLOSE-SHAVE bowed in gracious acknowledgment, not once, but twice. And then a third time. This, he thought exultantly, was his greatest histrionic achievement. Before the assembled multitude of his home town, he had gained the very pinnacle of Thespian success. And Abigail had scoffed at him, saying there was no dignity in this profession, that actors were the same as circus clowns. Yet what could be more dignified than this?

Never had Pelky known such soul-satisfying exaltation, such a soaring sense of total triumph. It dwarfed previous successes so that they seemed shallow; infinitesimal. All his life he had dreamed of being applauded by his friends and neighbors. All his life he had hoped and waited for this moment.

There was a salty sting in Pelky's eyes and a lump in his throat as he bowed again, and glimpsed the two speculators boarding the east-bound stage. Now all he had to do was accomplish a graceful exit, so that none of these smiling people would recognize him. And because he had already planned for this important part of the rôle he was playing, Pelky basked in a feeling of complete confidence as the stage-coach departed in a swirl of wheel-churned dust.

Beckoning to Parable Plunkett, he called:

"Please gather the individual deeds, my good man, and bring them to me. If they are all signed and in proper order I shall give you the entire amount of money for distribution to the owners."

It was the work of a moment for Doc Plunkett to gather the deeds, which he smilingly toted to Pelky.

"Seventeen of them," he said.

"Seventeen," Pelky mused, having already tallied the total in his mind. "Let me see now, that calls for—h'm-m, seventeen times eight hundred would be thirteen thousand, six hundred dollars."

He made a great show of counting the bundles of bills and presently placed them in Plunkett's arms.

"Is that correct?" he asked, with a benevolent smile.

"Absolutely correct, complete and quite convincing," Plunkett acknowledged with a note of genuine admiration in his voice.

"Then I shall be going," Close-Shave said casually.

He removed his derby and saluted the crowd, wanting to make this final gesture a fitting finale.

Then, because the heavy wig and resultant perspiration itched annoyingly, he used his coat sleeve to wipe his forehead—with somewhat startling results. The ribbon of his pince-nez caught in a button of the upswung cuff, jerking the glasses from his nose, and the swipe of the sleeve across his moist brow caused the wig to slip back so that his bald head was exposed.

"Lookee!" a small boy on the fringe of the crowd called with youthful exuberance. "He's got false hair!"

"That money might be false, too!" a man exclaimed suspiciously. "Let me take a good look at it, Doc!"

Confusion clawed at the tattered remnants of Close-Shave's confidence. Yet even then he thought he had a chance to escape identification. If he could get away without being recognized these folks would think he was some crazy crook who couldn't come back to claim his ill-gotten real estate.

His beard and mustache were still intact. All he had to do was get out of town, abandon the rig and sneak into the barber shop by a back alley. He had picked up the reins and was going to make a run for it when his wife screamed:

"Close-Shave Pelky, you scoundrel!"

Pelky wilted. He sat like a man too weak to move as Abigail rushed up to the rig and snatched off his false beard.

"Why you—you miserable faker!"

"He cheated us out of a chance to cheat them speculators!" the Widow Stonecypher wailed hysterically.

A veritable hail of accusation assaulted Pelky's ears.

"Where's Sheriff Sam?" a man shouted. "Pelky should be arrested for passing counterfeit money!"

"We don't need Sam," another man yelled. "We'll tar and feather the skunk and run him out of town!"

Close-Shave groaned.

He had foreseen derision and scorn if he should fail, but he hadn't expected reprisal in the form of physical violence. Fear and foreboding weighted him like a monstrous burden. Shame bowed his head until he sat slumped with chin on chest while irate citizens snatched their deeds from the buggy seat.

What an end to his fond memories of a theatrical past! What an ignoble climax to his secret hopes of future accomplishment in the art of acting! All that was shattered now, gone like his youth. Gone as completely.

PARABLE PLUNKETT elbowed his way to the buggy.

"A most unfortunate accident, but your plan was a success in spite of it," Doc sympathized. "The real-estaters have departed, so Broken Bow has been saved from abandonment. I shall explain this whole affair to everyone's satisfaction."

"But they won't be satisfied," Close-Shave said miserably. "They know I kept them from selling their homes to the greenhorns for real money. I—I guess they'll run me out of town, Doc. I guess they'll hate me as long as they live."

Which was when a portly stranger strode over from the Wells Fargo stage station and declared:

"If you folks are perturbed about that article in the Tombstone *Epitaph* let me report that it's utterly erroneous. My name is Sylvester Smith, general manager of Arizona-Western, and I have never been in Tombstone. Neither has my assistant, Johnathan Brown. Someone has obviously impersonated us for nefarious reasons known only to themselves."

"Do you mean to stand there and tell us that the railroad ain't goin' to Shirt Tail Flats—that it's comin' to Broken Bow like originally planned?" the Widow Stonecypher called in a high-pitched voice.

"It most certainly is," Smith assured her. "That's why I'm here—to arrange sites for a station, construction camp and commissary headquarters."

A strict hush settled on Main Street. For a dozen seconds, while the significance of Smith's declaration seeped slowly through the welter of confusion in Close-Shave Pelky's mind, no one moved nor spoke.

Then a man on the hotel veranda shouted:

"So that's why them two speculators was so anxious to buy our homes! They must've been the ones that got that piece put in the paper, so's they could bamboozle us into sellin' for a song!"

"Eureka!" Parable Plunkett exclaimed and, climbing into the livery rig, forced Close-Shave Pelky to stand where all could see him.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Parable bellowed. "Allow me to present the man who foiled as brazen a pair of scoundrels as ever invaded Broken Bow. Except for his foresight and theatrical artistry that pair of plundering rascals would now possess your domiciles and you would have no recourse through law, for they could claim you were endeavoring to cheat them. How about three ringing cheers for the finest actor west of the Pecos?"

A wild tumult of cheering was punctuated by shrill shouts of praise for Pelky. It was like a fantastic dream to Close-Shave, like a dream come true. Once again he was on stage, listening to the sweetest sound an actor can hear—the spontaneous applause of an appreciative audience.

(Continued on page 88)

"Now grab yore gun," Grandpappy said

HIGH WHEELS ROLLING

By BASCOM STURGILL

Grandpappy and Button are new at fighting Injuns—but they know a few tricks from feuding days back home in Kentucky!

GRANDPAPPY Jed had only a buckboard, lightly loaded, and when it came his turn to pull out of the slow-moving wagon train and hit the Lonesome Outpost Trail, he told his grandson to whip up them ornery flattails, that he was in a bodacious hurry.

"Shucks, Grandpappy," the young man protested, "we ain't in that much of a hurry to get to Andy's. Let's just fiddle along with the rest of these here folks that's goin' our way. It'd be a heap safer."

But Grandpappy was in no mood for haggling this morning. He knew too well why "Button" wanted to linger, and he was dead set against the idea.

"Give me them lines, Button," Grandpappy snorted. "I been waitin' too long for this here

trip to waste any time now. And, besides, Cindy Hency has done ditched yuh for that new wagon-master. Ain't yuh never goin' to learn that women loves a struttin' rooster with a high red comb—and that you ain't one."

Button cast a glance at the side of Grandpappy's granite-like face, with its overhanging brows and walrus mustache, and said no more. He knew that when Grandpappy used that tone it was best for whoever was listening to keep his trap shut. Grandpappy was as stubborn as a hickory wedge in a white oak log when he got his mind set.

However, Button didn't know that Grandpappy had a way of talking hard to cover a soft spot in his heart. For right now the older man was feeling mighty bad about having to separate Button from Cindy. Up until last night even Grandpappy had thought the girl was as eager after his grandson as a hound dog after a hot ham-hock.

But not any more, not after "Big Matt" Dawson had been elected to lead the Lonesome Outpost train and had come around Will Hency's wagon a-courtin'. Something had happened then, and while Grandpappy hadn't learned what it was, he didn't aim to have any blood kin of his making a fool of himself like a sick muley calf.

Partly to work off the resentment that was building up within him, and partly because he was in a hurry, Grandpappy slapped a line on Nellie's mouse-colored hide, shoving both mules into a fast jog. A surreptitious glance at the young man's white-lined lips and taut, high-boned face, told Grandpappy how deep the hurt had gone.

HE was mighty thankful when they reached the edge of the rimrock and shunted onto the down-slope toward Hollow Horn Basin, beyond sight of the other wagons. Now, Grandpappy told himself, maybe the boy would thaw out a bit. For he hated to be shut away from Button. It made him feel little and old and selfish, and Grandpappy knew that he was neither.

It was just that he and Granny Belle had planned this trip out to Andy's place for so long, and a man didn't live forever. First, there had been too long a struggle to raise their own young'uns good and proper, then there had come a passel of grandchildren.

"With one a-comin' or one a-carryin' all the time, Jed," Granny Belle had insisted, "I don't see how we can just pick up and leave, even to see Andy's little shavers."

Thus, Granny Belle had put him off from year to year, until that last sickness had come upon her, twisting her tired old muscles and sapping the strength of her heart. Then one day she had looked up at him with sadness in her big brown eyes.

"I reckon I'm a-fixin' to go Over Yonder, Jed," she had said. "But I can't go happy unless you promise to go see Andy and his little fellers. And I want you to take them that bright new brass lamp and some coal-oil from me. We ain't never give them nothin'."

"I promise yuh, honey," Jed had told her, "that there ain't nothin' this side of heaven that'll stop me from goin'."

Granny Belle had sighed then, and closed her weary eyes.

"And always remember, Jed," she had whispered, "that I'll be ridin' that great high-wheel prairie schooner with you, just like we planned it all these years. A-watchin' the tall prairie grasses blow in the wind and a-listenin' to the coyotes howl at night."

The next day they had carried her up that long yellow point back of the house and laid her to rest among the somnolent hills where she had been born, and Grandpappy had started getting ready. He told his children, in answer to their protests, that he reckoned a man had to keep his word to the dead, even if it killed him. So they had hitched the mules to the buckboard and sent Button along to kind of see after him.

Everything had gone well until they had joined the wagon train at Hastings and met the girl. From that moment on Button had been chousin' around like a barnyard rooster. And the way Grandpappy had it figured, he had shore got his tail feathers cropped good and proper. And talkin', seemed like, didn't do a mite of good.

So now Grandpappy pulled his hat low over keen old eyes and gave the mules their heads, waiting for some of the ill to work out of his grandson. The broad ribbon of the trail was easy to follow here in the tall grass, and it felt good to slouch along in the spring sunshine. It felt so good, indeed, that the reins soon fell from Grandpappy's hands and he slept.

Something queer had happened some time thereafter. The wagon had thrown a wheel, and, as Grandpappy told Will Hency just before sundown:

"The next thing I knowed I was a-fallin' out of the seat and Button was a-snatchin'

for me."

Grandpappy chuckled and his keen old eyes twinkled, implying that even Will Hency should be able to see through the boy's ruse. That wheel hadn't just rolled off of its own accord, Button's denial notwithstanding.

Will Hency laughed, also, but to Grandpappy it sounded dry, like the rustle of wind in a fodder shock.

"The boy's just wastin' his time," Will Hency said shortly. "I got a feelin' my daughter is through with him for good."

Something about the way Will Hency said that rubbed Grandpappy the wrong way. It was as though Will was speaking his own thoughts and putting them into the girl's mouth. And right away Grandpappy got the idea that Hency didn't pu. much store by the Crowders, himself and Button.

That wound up the little ball of yarn for Grandpappy Jed, because was as proud as he was stubborn. He stood for a moment looking at Will Hency, then turned without a word and marched stiffly over to his own wagon and sat down.

Palming a twist of home-grown Burley tobacco in gnarled hands, Grandpappy loaded his pipe and let his aggrieved eyes wander over to where Button and Cindy were talking. The supper chores were over, and most folks were sitting in friendly little groups around their campfires. Across the way, some one was plucking at a banjo and singing softly.

> He turned his face toward the wall,
> His back upon his darling.
> "I know I'll see you never more,
> So good-bye, Barb'ra Allen."

MANY a day, Grandpappy remembered with a touch of nostalgia, he'd bellered that song around the back of some new-ground corn row, him and Granny Belle in their young days, a-keepin' time to the scratch of their eyed-hoes. It was good to be young and in love, he told himself, even if it did bring hurt now and then.

But presently, Grandpappy was lifted rudely out of the past. His alert eyes had picked out the broad-shouldered figure of Big Matt Dawson striding pridefully over toward where Button and Cindy had dropped to the grass, and were holding what appeared to be a rather distant conversation. There was an arrogance about the wagon-master that never failed to raise Grandpappy's hackles, and he wondered what Button would do now.

Button couldn't very well tuck his tail feathers and run, because his courtship had been too obvious for that kind of leave-taking. And it was going to be mighty embarrassing to have to sit right there in the big middle of everybody and be rooted plumb out of the trough.

For the moment that Big Matt dropped onto the grass beside them the girl seemed to come alive, too much so, sort of pushing Button behind her like she would hide dirty hands. Nor did Big Matt fail to take full advantage of the tide that was in his favor. He ignored Button as completely as if he were the grass on which they sat.

And the girl was little better. It seemed to Grandpappy that both were overdoing the thing, as though with a malicious purpose, and he wondered just how much longer his trigger-tempered grandson could stand it.

Yet as the evening progressed, Grandpappy saw that his kin was at last really too whipped down to fight, and too proud to run away.

"Cussed old rooster with a high red comb," Grandpappy muttered into his whiskers. "He ain't nothin' but a windy show-off. We'll scald his hide and pick him feather clean yet, son. Just you wait. . . ."

When Grandpappy awoke the next morning it was still dark. But, strangely, he seemed to be moving. He lay for a moment beneath the canvas covers of the wagon and listened to the rattle of trace chains and the steady clop of mule's feet. Then he sat up and looked out the back of the wagon. In the far distance he could see the bravely flickering campfires and the ghostly bas-relief of the wagons.

"Hey, Button!" he stormed. "What in tarnation yuh doin', draggin' me off this-a-way before I've had my victuals?"

Button didn't answer, though Grandpappy was sure that he was out there. Mules didn't just get up in the middle of the night and take off across the prairie without a mite of help. So he climbed to the forward end of the wagon and looked out.

For once in his life he didn't know what to say. His lanky grandson had wrapped the ribbons about the foot brake and was plodding stoically along the trail ahead of the mules. The sight of his forlornly drooping shoulders told Grandpappy all he needed to know, made him a little heartsick.

This was just like the time that the boy had lost his pet pig back in the Kentucky

mountains, only worse. Grandpappy had been able to help him forget that loss by sticking a newly made pawpaw bark whistle between his quivering lips. But this time he knew that a pawpaw bark whistle wouldn't be enough. This was a deeper, more mature hurt—like when he'd lost Granny Belle.

Grandpappy had always been told that the only way to take the sting out of a burn was to poke it close to the fire again. The boy couldn't gain anything by running away, nothing but heartache and a brooding misery that might take a long time to heal. And it might bodaciously destroy him. Grandpappy had known of cases like that.

"Button!" he bellowed again, using his hard tone of voice. "Turn this here waggin right around and head back for camp. I ain't goin' to have no blood of mine runnin' like a biscuit-eater hound with a mouth full of egg-slobber."

Without lifting his head, the boy answered stubbornly.

"We ain't a-turnin' back—and we ain't a-runnin'. You been honin' to leave the rest of the folks, and now we're doin' it. That's all."

BUT Grandpappy didn't like the tone of Button's voice. It frightened him a bit. The boy had never set himself this way before. All the more reason, Grandpappy told himself, why he had to stop his dogged flight.

Yet, at this moment, he thought it unwise to get contentious. This was a situation that required some finesse.

"So be it then, son," he said gruffly.

But that indulgence was only a red herring drug across the trail of Grandpappy's real purpose. He had no intention of permitting the boy to become yellow. All morning long he cudgeled his foxy old brain, and many ideas came to him, such as laming a mule with a pebble under its collar. But any of them would have been disastrous to the real purpose of his westward trek, so he discarded them one by one.

Shortly after noon, however, they came to the banks of a shallow creek. According to the crude map that Grandpappy carried, this little willow fringed stream was known as Horse-fly Creek. It was marked as an ideal campsite, and the slow-moving ox-drawn wagons would just about make it by sundown.

Button pushed the mules out into the clear water and let them drink their full, then hazed them on again. He had no intention of being overtaken here. But Grandpappy had other ideas. This was too good a chance to pass up.

Still, he sat quietly in the back of the wagon, long legs dangling over the tail-gate, and watched the trail slip under his feet. About two miles from the creek he eased his old squirrel rifle from beneath the quilts where he had stowed it. Then, with a weather eye cocked on Button, he stole over the end gate and scurried like a frightened jack-rabbit into the tall grass beside the trail.

He wasn't afraid that Button would miss him for some time yet, because the boy was too preoccupied with his misery. But Grandpappy wasn't taking any chances. He lay there for half an hour, listening to the beat of his heart, and recalling belatedly that Texas still had bands of roving and bitter Comanche and Kiowa Indians which would find great delight in attacking lone travelers or small trains.

But Grandpappy was made of sturdy material, and once committed to a course of action, he seldom deviated. Thus, after he was sure that the boy could not turn and see him, he arose and started back toward the creek.

"That'll teach yuh, carnsarn yuh, that when I say we ain't runnin' we ain't runnin'," he chuckled.

For Grandpappy was sure that Button would miss him before nightfall and return to locate him. And by that time the other wagons would have arrived.

But Grandpappy had reckoned without allowances for age and the sapping strength of the western sun. By the time he staggered into the willows along the bank of Horse-fly Creek his feet were dragging his sign, and he was more than glad to sink to the soft, shaded earth.

Lying there with his heart pounding in his ears, and the heavy silence gathering about him like something alive, Grandpappy might well have been in another world. This world, for the moment, belonged to Granny Belle and himself. This was the world they had dreamed of seeing together—these endless stretches of earth and sky, the rim-rock rising in the hazy distance like a guardian wall, the sea of high grasses and the soft, prairie wind that was like the caress of a woman's lips on his skin.

It was four somnolent hours later when the first faint rattle of wheels reached his ears. He stood up and looked through a small opening in the willows toward the east. The

billowing white canvas of Big Matt Dawson's lead wagon was just topping the crest of a slight roll. Grandpappy watched the wagons lumber, one by one, onto the down-slope toward the creek ford. Like a waddling flock of geese, he told himself.

Already, the sun was settling beyond the shaggy rim-rock, and heavy shadows were stealing over the willow grove. Grandpappy looked west. There was no sign of Button, and a vague uneasiness stole over him. The boy should have been here by this time. Unless, of course—and Grandpappy stumbled over the thought—he had decided to keep going. Call his bluff of authority.

THUS preoccupied, Grandpappy wasn't sure just when he first observed the issuance of certain vague sounds from the willows just below the ford. The knowledge came upon him gradually, and it was with little concern that he let his gaze seek their source. A moment later he jerked suddenly erect, grasping his gun. He had seen the half-naked figure of a man slink between two bushes.

"Injuns, by cracky!" he whispered.

Grandpappy swore softly. Now old Nick would be to pay. The immigrants across the creek knew nothing of the presence of the red men, and Button was still out there on the open plains, an easy target for attack in case he did return.

"Cuss it," Grandpappy thought bitterly, "a man ain't got no call shakin' apples from a tree less he knows which-a-way they aim to roll when they hit the ground. Now mebbe Button can't get back a-tall."

Time suddenly became a pressure. The immigrants had to be warned, and Button had to be stopped somehow before he blundered into the ambush. And because Grandpappy believed in doing first things first, he slipped into the creek and headed for the wagon encirclement, crawling on hands and knees through the sheltering grass.

Ruddy-faced Will Hency was the first to see him, and he grinned, a mite contemptuously, Grandpappy thought.

Then Will Hency was yelling:

"Hey, Matt, come here and see what's turned rabbit hound!"

Grandpappy made a desperate motion for silence with his shaggy, white head, but Will Hency and Big Matt Dawson seemed not to comprehend. Loud guffaws and much pointing soon brought others to witness the spectacle of an old man playin' houn'-dog. Among them was Cindy Hency, wiping sour dough batter from her hands onto her calico apron.

"Struck airy trail yet, Grandpappy?" Big Matt yelled, slapping his stout thighs in high glee. "And, by the way, where is the pup runnin'?"

This reference to Button was just too much for Grandpappy. He came to his feet, waving his rifle above his head, eyes flashing angrily.

"Laugh, yuh bodacious fools!" he bellowed. "I only come back to warn yuh that they's a whole passel of Injuns hidin' out in the willers across the creek. An' since yuh're so high and mighty, I reckon I'll just leave yuh to do yore own fightin'."

Instead of sobering the immigrants to their danger, this bit of information was taken as a huge joke, set them into fresh waves of laughter, led by Big Matt Dawson's booming bass music.

"So it's Injuns now," the big wagon-master chortled. "Take a better yarn than that to get a deserter back in the good graces of this outfit, old man."

Almost at the last word from Big Matt's thick lips, a shot rang out from the willow thicket, from the near side of the creek. Grandpappy jerked, dropped his rifle from a shattered arm, then dived into the tall grass.

"Cuss yuh, Dawson," he yelled furiously, "yore loud mouth got me this shot! Some day I'll pay yuh back, for certain."

As the sound of musketry lifted to battle proportions, Grandpappy grasped his rifle and started snaking back toward the creek bank, hidden by the tall grass. His main concern was to head Button off from the fight. Or, in case he failed to return, to find out what had happened to him.

Reaching the creek, Grandpappy tarried a moment to watch the fight. Now and then between the flat crack of a rifle, a flaming arrow would lance toward the canvas-covered wagons, find its mark and flare up instantly. At first, some of the settlers tried to fight the fire, but soon learned a bitter lesson. These Indians were not such poor shots, and their attack was beginning to tell on the immigrants.

Then it was that Grandpappy noticed that the Indians had left their ponies beyond the creek, close down by the water. There were perhaps twenty animals, in charge of two painted young bucks. That meant that eighteen fighters were set against the eight

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men in the wagon train. Terrible odds, Grandpappy told himself.

SLIPPING into the shallow creek, he waded across and pulled himself up the muddy bank. And the first thing that met his searching eye was the white top of his own little wagon sweeping into sight across a slight knoll a few hundred yards removed. Button was standing up in the bed, popping the lines on the backs of the mules with a fury that told of his fear.

Grandpappy saw the two young bucks shoot startled glances toward the approaching wagon, then with an idea born of desperation, he leaped into the open, shed his red linsey shirt and began waving it up and down to attract the boy's attention. This brought fire from one of the pony guards, and Grandpappy had to seek shelter again. But not until he was sure that the boy had seen him and understood.

About two hundred yards above the ponies Grandpappy stopped running and waited for his grandson to reach him. Button pulled into the willows and ground to a sliding halt.

"What's all the shootin'?" he demanded, his high boned face still set in lines of worry.

"Injuns!" Grandpappy snorted. "Hand me down the crock of coal oil yore Granny sent along. We can use it mighty handy now."

Button needed no further urging. He had heard all about how the Injuns scalp their victims, and he had no hankering to lose his forelock. But he didn't reckon they was any worse than them feudin' Tollivers back in the Kentucky hills, so he wasn't really afraid. It was the girl he was worried about most.

"Grab yore gun," Grandpappy said, "and head for the creek. Be careful with that crock of oil."

The oldster hit the water first, with Button close on his heels. In the middle of the stream Grandpappy stopped and turned to the boy.

In another moment the swiftly coursing little creek was coated with a bluish film of coal-oil. Grandpappy watched it spread and ripple downward with a satisfied smile on his lips.

"Strike a light to her, son," he said presently.

The result was not instantaneous, but it was swift and effective. The oil ignited and a broad ribbon of flame rushed downstream, licking hungrily at the oil on the surface of

[*Turn to page 86*]

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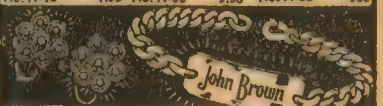

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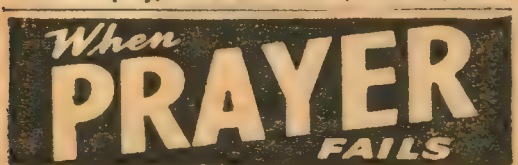

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the water, lifting a black wall of smoke behind it. Overhead, low-hanging leaves and dry branches crackled and fried in the heat that was galloping slowly down to separate the Indians from their ponies.

"Now grab your gun and let's get set," Grandpappy said. "Things ought to happen mighty quick-like now."

Even before they reached the top of the slippery bank, both Grandpappy and Button heard the excited jabbering of the Indian warriors, the hasty cessation of gunfire. This was followed immediately by the frightened whinnying of the ponies, and the sounds of a hasty retreat across the creek ahead of the wall of flame.

"It's a-workin'—it's a-workin'!" Grandpappy cried. "That got 'em scared. They ain't never seen nothin' like it before."

"Bet they think it's the end of the world!" Button laughed, hanging close to his grandfather's heels.

Just as the two of them reached the edge of the willows from which they could see, the Indians began to pour from the stream and climb aboard their mounts. Grandpappy dropped to one bony knee and raised his injured arm to rest his rifle, then pressed the trigger. One of the redskins slipped from his terrified pony into the grass and was seen no more.

"Get 'em, son!" Grandpappy yelled in high glee. "Just like they was them plague-taked Tollivers back to home. And don't miss ary shot."

With the terrifying fear of the holocaust in their hearts, and the drone of Kentucky mountaineer lead in their ears, the Indians disappeared beyond the first knoll in fast time, their plumed heads bent close into flying horses' manes.

"Look at 'em go!" Grandpappy yelled. "Yippee!"

Then the thing happened that he had not anticipated. The fire that had been struck to terrify the Indians and their ponies had exactly the same effect on Grandpappy's two mouse-colored mules. They had stopped with their noses pushed into the willows, and with all the smell and the noise around them, they had reached the conclusion that running was also their forte.

INTO the willows they dived, splintering the wagon and scattering its contents. The ensuing racket only lent wings to their feet. Across the creek in a shower of spray,

up the slippery banks and into the willows again, they went, like a maddened Juggernaut that bent every twig before them and stripped all restraint.

Listening to them run, some of the joy of the moment dwindled from Grandpappy's old heart. What had started out to be a magnificent gesture of help for the immigrants who had scorned him, was now a disaster. For everything that he owned in the world, except the clothes on his back and his rifle, was in that wagon. Even the new brass lamp that Granny Belle had sent out to Andy—and he knew everything had been ruined.

Not only that, but from now on he would have to ride bareback plumb to Lonesome Outpost Creek, where Andy lived. He no longer had a wagon.

He got up then and headed for the wreckage. It was just as he had expected. Boxes were broken open, clothes torn and mud-stained, wagon shattered. And the brass lamp was bent until it looked like a golden slice of ripe pumpkin.

He bent over and retrieved the lamp from the mud into which it had been mashed, held it in his knotty hands with an expression of sadness creeping into the leathery lines of his shadowy face. This trinket he had prized above all else, because Granny Belle had so wanted to get it to Andy. Now it was ruined, and he had not kept his last promise to her.

And after a bit it dawned on Grandpappy that he and Button were no longer alone. The immigrants were swarming into the creek and up the bank toward them, stooping to pick up his scattered belongings as they advanced. Cindy Hency was throwing herself into the fold of Button's long arms, crying and laughing at the same time.

"Oh, Button, I won't ever get mad at you again! I only wanted to make you jealous because you wanted to leave me and go on ahead with your grandpappy. Matt Dawson didn't never mean nothing to me."

Grandpappy had to smile at this, for beyond the two young shoulders he could see the big wagon-master's face going turkey red. Here, at last, was payment in kind for the distress that he had heaped upon the boy.

[*Turn page*]

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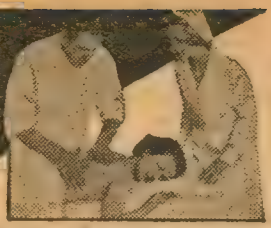

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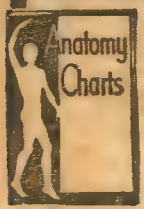

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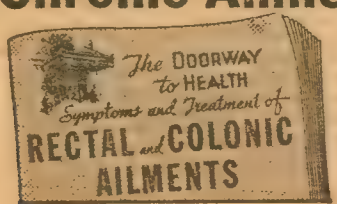

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Will Hency came forward then, holding a pair of torn homespun trousers in his hands. He was smiling, and Grandpappy observed that a sort of half-shamed friendliness was pushing up into his eyes.

"Well, Grandpappy," he began, "I reckon we had you and the boy all wrong—and if yuh be willin', I'd like to forget and help yuh get fixed up for rollin' west again. It won't take more'n a day or so to fix up yore waggin. Me, I'm a blacksmith by trade, and it would shore give me pleasure."

The smile on Grandpappy's face widened.

"I've been worse mistook, Will," he said slowly, "and lived it down. But the thing I'm worryin' about most is this here little brass lamp. Do yuh reckon yuh could find a manner to kind of fix it up a bit. I promised my old woman I'd get it to our boy on Lonesome Outpost Creek, and I'd shore hate to fail her now. She's dead, yuh know."

Will Hency took the brass lamp in capable-looking hands, turned it over and over, then, with a slight catch in his throat, said:

"I reckon I'd be a mighty poor smithy if I couldn't fix a little old mite of a thing like this here lamp."

That was enough for Grandpappy. He knew that Will Hency would fix the lamp all right, because Will Hency understood now. And Granny Belle understood about the oil, too. She had been right there with him all the while. She would always be with him as long as that little old brass lamp could spread its yellow glow over the faces of Andy's kids.

COMICAL AS A CLOWN

(Concluded from page 78)

He bowed in dignified fashion, giving gracious acknowledgment to the sustained cheering. Then he absent-mindedly backed toward where the wings would be if this had been a stage—and fell sprawling from the buggy.

He was sitting in the dust, utterly bewildered, when he heard Parable Plunkett announce:

"And that, ladies and gentlemen, should convince you that Close-Shave Pelky is also the most comical actor in Arizona Territory!"

"Yeah," Close-Shave agreed forlornly, "comical as a clown."

•

Next Issue: THE COURTING OF KATE, Another Broken Bow Story by L. ERNENWEIN

THE BUNKHOUSE

(Continued from page 8)

tana. And John X. Beidler became recognized as one of the West's great peace officers.

Murrieta, California Badman

Some of the West's badmen were just naturally bad. It seemed a heritage, as if they were born for a career of crime. Others were driven into crime by injustices heaped upon them. One of the most bloodthirsty was Joaquin Murrieta, of California, and there is a question as to just what kind of a man he would have been had he been allowed to live in peace.

Joaquin, accompanied by his brother, went to Sacramento in an effort to establish title to a mine. But before he had time to shake the trail dust from his sombrero, the brother and another Mexican were lynched on a charge of horse-stealing.

Murrieta returned to San Francisco for his wife and took her with him to a claim on the Stanislaus River. Here he was promptly ordered to move on, but refused. He was knocked unconscious and his wife was slain.

Then, in the spring of 1850, while working in Calaveras County, he was accused of stealing a horse which he had actually borrowed. When he insisted that the horse belonged to his friend, Valenzuela, the latter was hanged and Murrieta was tied to a tree and lashed almost to death.

The Vow of Vengeance

Murrieta vowed vengeance. And soon all California was living in terror of Joaquin and his elusive, hard-riding, sharp-shooting band. Ranch houses and miners' cabins went up in flames, lighting with lurid blaze the bodies of their murdered owners. Every trail and road could tell its gruesome tale of robbery and sudden death.

Millions in gold poured into Murrieta's treasury. People lost count of his wholesale killings. But there was no dispute about the fact that Murrieta did not confine his lethal attentions to Americans. On the contrary, he murdered several of his own countrymen, and permitted his lieutenant, Three-Finger Jack, to amuse himself by slitting the throats of helpless Chinese.

Neither greed nor vengeance sufficiently explain Murrieta's motives for murder. Today he might be pronounced insane and confined in an asylum, but in 1853 there was no time for such niceties. Finally Joaquin was run to earth and killed by Captain Harry Love. His head was chopped off, pre-

[*Turn page*]

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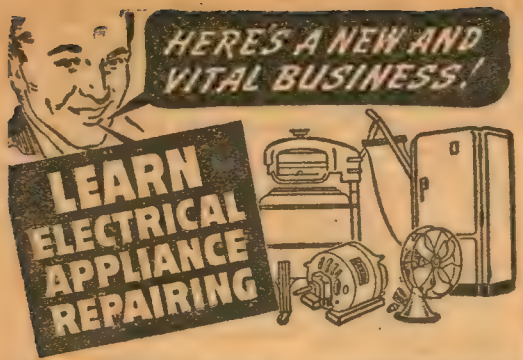

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Hard to Kill

But Western bandits, like Western peace officers, were hard to kill. For years longer, each particularly atrocious murder brought rumors that Joaquin still lived. And as late as 1919 an old man in Chile claimed to be the selfsame Joaquin Murrieta, whose name once struck terror from end to end of California's Mother Lode.

There were a number of noted characters or heroes of the West who were more or less mythical, their true identity somewhat clouded. Old Bill Williams, after whom a town, a mountain and a river fork in Arizona was named, was one of them. No one seemed to know from whence he came, or where he went. Another of this type of character was California Joe. He was a unique character with many odd traits.

Who was California Joe? This question many may consider themselves able to answer, but no one, perhaps, can distinguish between the California Joes who have figured in so many escapades attributed to this enigmatic character, for more than one person adopted the title.

A Staunch and True Friend

Where was he born? No one will attempt to answer. The California Joe who hunted, trailed, fought and slept beside Gen. Custer and Buffalo Bill is believed to have been a native of Kentucky. Buffalo Bill maintained his name was Joseph Milmer, Capt. Payne declared it was Joseph Hawkins, but whatever the real name, he was one of the most unique characters the West has ever known, a staunch and true friend always ready to help anyone he could.

In the summer of 1849 a party of sixty-five hardy adventurers from Kentucky, with California Joe as their leader, attempted an overland journey to California. They proceeded without interruption for several weeks, and then when they were in the Indian country, unaware of the treachery of the red men, they were ambushed and the entire party wiped out with the exception of Joe and another man who managed to escape.

Joe was wounded, but he managed to escape in the darkness and, crawling to the river, floated on a log down to Ft. Lyon, where he was taken out of the water and cared for. He was, however, a fellow with plenty of determination, and in about two

months, with his wounds entirely healed, he again attempted the trip to California. He had with him on this occasion but two companions, but he had learned a lesson and this time they took more precautions when camping in Indian country. These precautions did no good, however, as they were pounced upon by twenty-five Utahs as they were passing through the gateway of the Rocky Mountains. After a bitter struggle Joe's comrades were killed and he was taken prisoner.

Having taken Joe a prisoner the Utahs, to make of him a ceremonial sacrifice, prepared to burn him at the stake. Tying him securely to a tree, they piled dry wood around him, but placed it a little distance from his feet so that there would be prolonged torture before death came. After lighting the fire they sat down, filled their pipes and started to smoke as part of the ceremony.

The prisoner had no hope of rescue, but he started in yelling at the top of his voice, hoping that the Indians would grow angry and shoot him and thus end it quickly. His cries, however, and the glow of the fire, attracted the attention of a party of trappers camped less than a half a mile away.

The trappers, fifty in number, rushed near the spot and saw what the situation was. A deadly volley from their guns made quick work of the Indians and Joe was rescued, but the fire had burned his buckskin trousers and the skin along his legs. After his recovery some weeks later, he took up trapping with the party which had rescued him and trapped with them for more than a year.

Performed Many Good Deeds

Whether it was in his heart to start with, or whether it was the experience he had had at the hands of the Indians and his rescue, from that time on California Joe seemed to live to do good deeds, to help others.

An old trapper named Reynolds, one of the very first white men ever to set foot in the Black Hills country, had settled on the Yellowstone with his large family of children. Among the children was a beautiful girl of eleven named Maggie, and she liked to hunt and although young in years she was old in courage and often killed deer and other game.

While it was Maggie's custom never to stray very far from the cabin, one night she did not return. A search was instituted and went on for more than a week without results, and the parents finally concluded that Maggie had been devoured by some wild beast or carried off by Indians.

Some months after Maggie's strange disappearance California Joe, while trapping on the Yellowstone, visited old man Rey-

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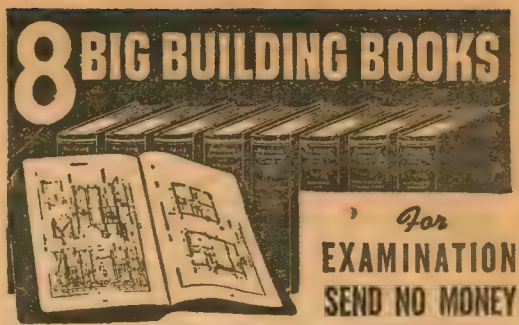

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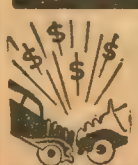

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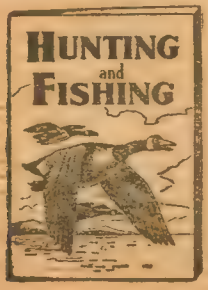

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nolds, and during this visit was made acquainted with the circumstances of little Maggie's strange disappearance. He at once exclaimed:

"I'll bet a silver fox's skin that that 'ar gal is now with them thar tarnal Cheyennes; fact I already hearn thar was a white face 'mong them wretches."

Hearing this assertion, Mrs. Reynolds began to lament and between sobs of grief she pleadingly inquired if there were any means by which her daughter could be rescued.

"Yer bet thar is," replied Joe, "and more than that, Mrs. Reynolds, I'll just undertake to find her myself!"

Having given his promise, Joe proceeded to a spot where he knew a party of Cheyennes were encamped, with whom he had done some trading only a few days before. He selected four of the tribe he was best acquainted with, and after treating them to a large bottle of frontier whiskey, he made a bargain with them (stipulating more firewater) for the restoration of the little girl.

These four Indians set out to find a large village of their tribe located near the headwaters of the Missouri. They found the village and located the girl, who was in the custody of an old squaw who was using her as a servant.

Skilfully the four Indians managed to acquaint the little girl with the rescue plans and that night she sneaked away from the side of the old squaw, with whom she slept, and met the Indians, who took her down the river a short distance to where she was taken in charge by Joe.

The Battle at the Cabin

As quickly as possible Joe returned Maggie to her parents. He knew that her escape would be discovered and it was shortly after the girl left the Indian village that ten braves started in pursuit, going directly to the Reynolds' cabin, but Joe had already returned the girl to the parents and the household was ready for the battle they knew would come.

The Indians attempted to storm the cabin and take the girl by force, but they were met with a volley of gunfire at the hands of Joe and Mr. Reynolds, as well as Mrs. Reynolds, who was true to the type of frontier women and could handle a rifle with deadly effect. The battle was lively, but protected by the cabin, the party inside sustained no injury while they succeeded in killing five of the Indians and driving the others away.

The country, however, had now become too dangerous for a longer residence on the Yellowstone, and the Reynolds family speedily abandoned their home and fled southward with Joe to the North Platte.

Many were the good deeds California Joe

performed, many were the Indian battles in which he took part. He had many narrow escapes. He was once attacked by a panther and came near meeting death on that occasion. He lived through some tough times, went through many tough spots and emerged alive.

Everyone who knew Joe was his friend, or thus it was believed, but his end came when he was shot down by a cowardly assassin, shot in the back while sitting in front of his cabin. His assassination occurred on the fifth of December, 1876, just four months after his friend Wild Bill Hickok had met death in much the same manner. Joe's assassin got away and was never apprehended.

So ended the life of one of the heroes of the old West, a man like most of the other pioneers who seemed born to live a rugged life. But the ruggedness never kept them from having tender hearts and true love for their country and their fellow man. *Adios.*

—FOGHORN CLANCY.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

CERTAIN key towns formed a vital factor in the development of certain sections in the early days of the West. Boise, capital of the huge Idaho Territory, was one of these towns. The river of the same name made the valley a rich one, and the city was a trade center. There were ranches in the valley and surrounding hills, and northward lay the mines, the forests, feeding wealth into the settlement.

In Boise there were men of evil who plotted in ruthless fashion to take over the town and it is these men that Bob Pryor and his friends are forced to battle in IDAHO RAIDERS, the exciting book-length novel by Tom Curry in the next issue.

When they first arrived in the Boise Valley the Rio Kid, Al Sieber and Celestino Mireles discovered an outlaw hangout high up back in the mountains. The trio had managed to sneak up and look the place over without being seen, and then had slipped away and camped for the night. Hidden in the brush, they had slept until dawn and then started down the trail, alert for signs of the outlaws.

"Watch it, boys," warned the Rio Kid suddenly. "Some of them are comin' down!"

They hid themselves, each keeping a hand over the horse's muzzle so the animal would not betray them. A dozen road agents, well-armed, wearing rough clothing and flat hats, rode past them, headed toward the valley highway which led to the gold fields.

When the enemy had ridden on, the trio followed, careful to hang back out of sight and hearing. The outlaws kept on the moun-

[*Turn page*]

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tain trail, and reached the north-and-south road connecting the goldfields and the country to the north, and Boise. Here the outlaws hid themselves, so that the Rio Kid and his friends were pinned down unless they wished to detour through the rocky woods.

"Wonder what they're up to now?" asked Sieber.

They soon found out. The sun had come up, and it was a warm, lovely day. They could see the brown, winding road, and after a time a man on a black horse came riding along from the north.

The thieves were close to the track, and when the traveler was abreast of them, they sprang out. Two seized the black's bridle from either side, while others brandished pistols and shotguns. The startled victim, a man named Lew Mills, lifted his hands.

Mills faced his fate with all the courage he could muster as he stared into Colt and shotgun muzzles, behind them the brutal faces of the robbers.

It was ironical, too, enough to send a pang through the stoutest heart, for he had slaved in the mines for nearly a year, and only the week before he had made a decent strike. The nuggets and dust in the canvas money-belt snugged around his waist held about $3,000 in metal.

At such close range there was nothing to do but obey the commands of his captors. Robberies and killings were common enough in such wild country. Mills hoped to escape by handing over his gold.

"Huh, he's got quite a load," said a stocky, bearded robber, who held a pistol in his left hand while he felt under Mills' shirt with his right. "Plump rascal, ain't he?"

The laughter of the highwaymen was not pleasant. Mills' brown eyes were wide as he bit his lips. He remained quiet in the saddle while they lifted his moneybelt. His pistol had been snatched from its holster when they had first stopped him. He tried to impress the features of the thieves on his brain, so he could describe them later to the authorities.

"Ain't a bad hoss he's got, either," observed a lanky man, a tobacco cud bulging his beaded cheek.

Suddenly Mills realized they were going to kill him—it would be much the safest way for them to dispose of a victim. It was too late to fight. . . .

"Let's have a little sport," said the stocky robber, who seemed to be in command. "Tie his hands and we'll hang him by the ankles to that big pine over there. He'll make a fine target for practicin'."

Mills tried to fight but rough hands pulled him from his saddle and they beat him down with gun barrels, tied his hands behind him, and dragged him toward a tall pine not far

off. They would toss a lariat over the limb above, hoist him up, fire away.

When three men broke out of the thicket and dashed in, Mills thought they were more of the robbers—but they were actually the Rio Kid and his two pards.

"Throw down, outlaws!" the Rio Kid yelled, his revolver raised.

With him, a few yards on either side, rode Mireles and Sieber. Celestino carried a knife in one hand, and a pistol in the other. Sieber wielded a sawed-off shotgun.

The startled road agents, bunched about Mills in anticipation of the sport, turned to face the fresh challenge. One tried for the Rio Kid, but Pryor's Colt roared and the outlaw lashed back, screaming from a body wound.

The shotgun in Sieber's hand roared at close range. Lew Mills, released by his captors, threw himself on the ground. Buckshot cut the bandits. Mireles, teeth gleaming, gun barking and knife flashing in the sunlight, drove in. The robbers still on their feet, broke and ran madly off, seeking the protection of the woods up the slope, of rocks, anything for cover. Bullets from the attacking trio kept them hopping, yelling.

The Mexican cut free Mills' wrists, and Lew jumped up and ran to his horse.

"Ride, young feller!" called the Rio Kid. "Get movin'."

Thanks to the aid of the three men who had come so unexpectedly to his defense, Lew Mills did get away and reached the town of Boise safely. The Rio Kid, Mireles and Sieber also reached the town after visiting the Square F ranch and finding that Dan Faber, the owner of the spread, had ridden into Boise.

In the town Pryor and his companions found Dan Faber, and later the Rio Kid, Mireles, and Sieber rode out to the Square F with Faber. Here they gathered a bunch of waddies and cattlemen for an attack on the hideout of the outlaws.

Action and suspense steadily mount as the Rio Kid battles the badmen with wits and guns, and finally unmasks the fiends who have been plotting to take over the town and the surrounding country for their own sinister purpose! IDAHO RAIDERS is a novel packed with thrills from start to finish. You will enjoy every bit of it!

[*Turn page*]

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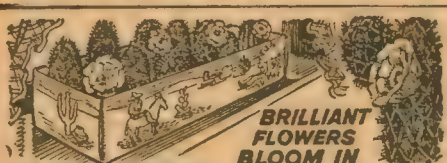

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LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

LET'S hear from more of our readers! We value your opinions, and that's why we are always eager to have you write and tell us just what you think of THE RIO KID WESTERN.

Here are excerpts from just a few of the letters we have been getting:

Have just finished reading the latest issue of THE RIO KID WESTERN. It's some book! I sure enough enjoyed it all the way through. CROWN FOR AZORA, by Dean Owen, was a good story about Bob Pryor. What I like are the famous characters of the old West that the Rio Kid meets in his travels. The pictures with the little stories under them about these famous men are always interesting. Keep up the good work.—*Donald Small, San Francisco, California.*

Thanks for your letter, Don. Glad you liked the magazine so well.

I have been following he adventures of the Rio Kid for the past four years. All the stories are good, but WAGONS TO CALIFORNIA was my favorite. The other novels I liked best were STOLEN EMPIRE, LORD OF THE SILVER LODE and BORDER PATROL. —*Randall Perkins, Hardyville, Kentucky.*

Well, Randall, since Tom Curry wrote WAGONS TO CALIFORNIA and BORDER PATROL while Lee E. Wells wrote STOLEN EMPIRE and LORD OF THE SILVER LODE, it looks like those two authors tie for first place with you. Thanks for writing.

Way back in 1940 I started reading THE RIO KID WESTERN. First I read THE TRAIL BLAZERS, by Tom Curry, and wanted more, so I read THE BUFFALO HUNTERS and THE RIO KID RIDES AGAIN, both by Tom Curry. Since then I have read around thirty novels about Bob Pryor by various authors and I have liked them all. Also enjoyed lots of the short stories in the magazines. Don't you think I might be considered a steady reader of THE RIO KID Western? —*Thomas Brown, Chicago, Ill.*

There's no doubt about it, Tom! You certainly have been a steady reader—and many thanks to you.

That's all for this time, but keep your comments, suggestions and ideas rolling in. Please address all letters and postcards to The Editor, THE RIO KID WESTERN, 10 East 40th Street, New York, 16, N. Y. All communications are carefully read and studied, whether we print excerpts from them in this department or not—and you may be sure we are grateful for each and every communication! See you all next issue and thanks, everybody.

—THE EDITOR.

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Regardless of your age, sex, previous experience, and whether you are an ex-serviceman or not, we will send you astonishing free facts about the unlimited possibilities—in your own business—with amazing LIQUID MARBLE and our other marvelous new products. To secure this information, absolutely free, fill in coupon below or send a letter or postcard. No salesman will call on you now or ever. Write TODAY! Offer limited.

1. **LIQUID MARBLE.** Make beautiful artificial Marble Slabs. Pour from liquid state. Glazed or unglazed. This marble may be mottled, veined, multi-colored or left in original snow-white state. The color is actually a part of the marble! Does not fade or wear away. LIQUID MARBLE is unsurpassed on kitchen or bathroom walls. Easy to make and install.
2. **PLASTIC FLOORING.** May be made in any color or combination of colors. Gives a lifetime of wear. Dustproof. Soundproof. Verminproof. Resilient to the tread. Lay out solid from wall to wall or in pattern design of various shaped blocks.
3. **FLEXIBLE MOLDS.** For plaster casting. Make your own molds for few cents each. $1.00 in raw materials will make up to $25.00 worth of finished goods. We furnish names of buyers.

FREE! EXTRA! If you write us promptly we will include free information about our other big money-making businesses. These include Compo-Tile Roofing and Caen Stone, Plastic Wood, Artificial Marble and Granite, Stone and Metal Solder, Plastic Tile Cement, Papier Mache, and many others.

Greatest Opportunities NOW!

With reconversion going ahead full speed, NOW is the time to line up your own money-making business. We offer you our **BIG THREE** money-making opportunities together with other equally profitable businesses. (See paragraph at right.) Get the FREE facts TODAY!

COMPO-TEX, Box 786-TG, St. Louis, Mo.

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Please send me free details of your BIG THREE Money-Making Propositions including LIQUID MARBLE. Also include information about the additional new business possibilities given directly above.

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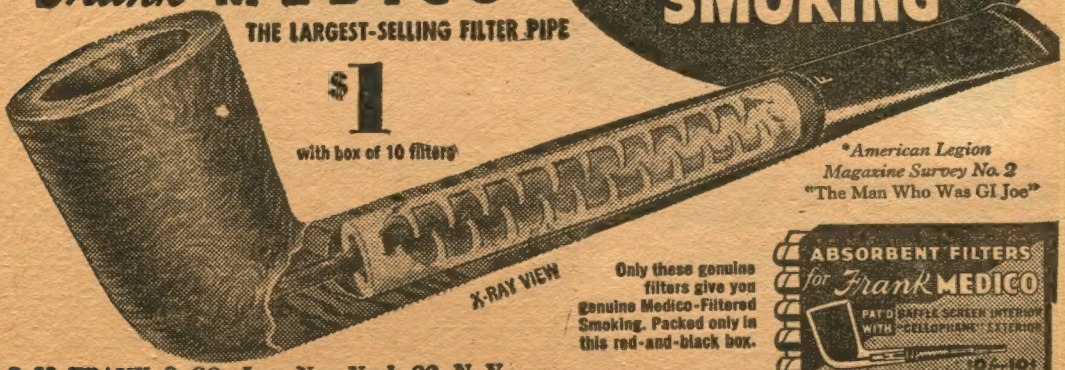

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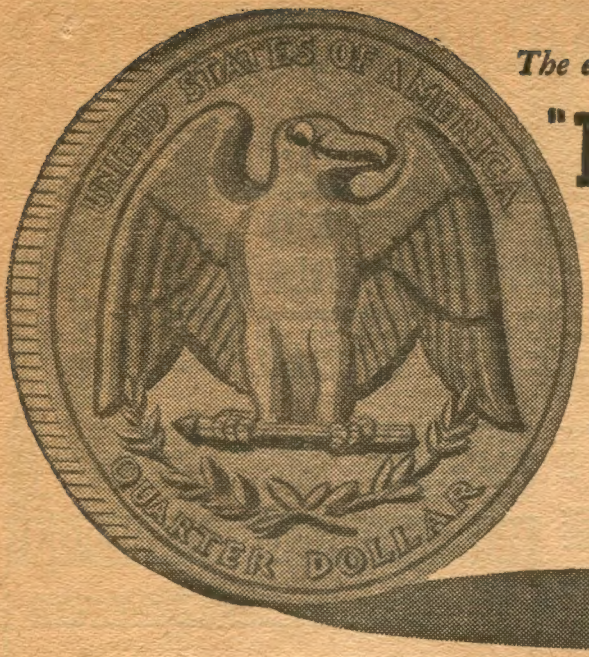

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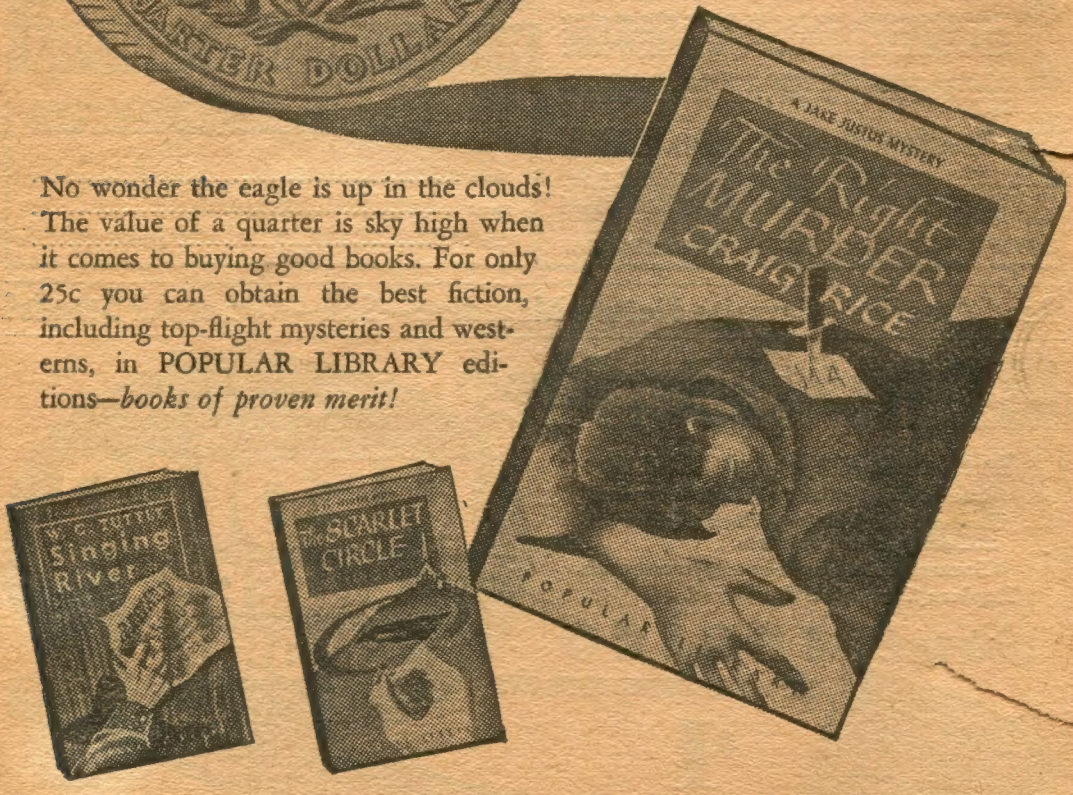

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